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A ROMANCE OF THE NURSERY



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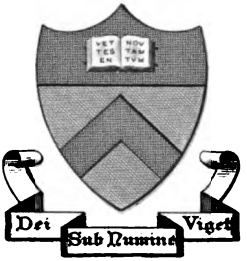
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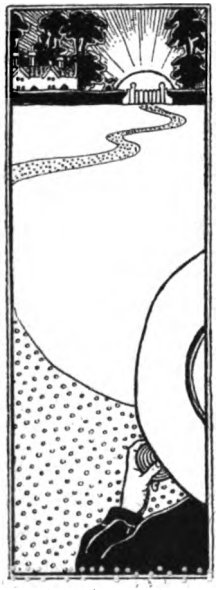
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A
ROMANCE OF THE NURSERY

WRITTEN BY
MRS. L. ALLEN HARKER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KATHARINE M. ROBERTS



JOHN LANE. THE BODLEY HEAD
LONDON AND NEW YORK. MCMIII

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To my Good Comrades

GINNIE AND BER AND BA.

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. . . and Romance,
The Angel-Playmate, raining down
His golden influences
On all I saw, and all I dreamed and did,
Walked with me arm and arm,
Or left me, as one bediademed with straws
And bits of glass, to gladden at my heart
Who had the gift to seek and feel and find
His fiery-hearted presence everywhere.

— *W. E. Henley.*

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A ROMANCE *of* THE NURSERY

I

WHICH INTRODUCES US

"Fool!" said my muse to me,
"Look in thy heart and write."

SIR PHILIP SYDNEY

THIS is not a story. It is rather a series of impressions; impressions grown more vivid as time has formulated and lent to them perspective, of certain strange, fantastic little personalities, dropped inconsequently into a commonplace world one rainy summer, years ago.

"Mr. Glynn is a poet, so you must try not to make too much noise while he is here; literary people are always so nervous." Thus Miss Goodlake, our long-suffering governess, the day before his arrival. "'Vex not the poet's mind!'" she proceeded to quote.

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"I don't suppose we shall see much of him," interrupted Harry in a grumbling voice. "Anyway, I hope to goodness he won't come and say his poetry to us."

He came, was seen, and conquered us, every one.

He not only sought our society on all possible occasions, but procured us extra half-holidays, showing his appreciation of our companionship by spending them with us.

In our minds, poetry had hitherto been associated solely with a meek little fawn-coloured book, from whose pages we had to learn by heart dismal legends of wrecked schooners; of little boys destroyed by fire and sword; the halt, the maimed, the blind, always something melancholy. Our governess was certainly a victim to the pathetic fallacy.

Now Mr. Glynn encouraged criticism and sympathised with our aversion from the fawn-coloured collection of dirges. Nay,

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more! He even went so far as to send to that mysterious London, where he dwelt, for a gay green book in which the poems were easy to learn as their subject-matter was entrancing. He told Miss Goodlake that they were "quite new" and invited her opinion in such wise that she was persuaded to substitute it for the other. Blessed little book! By its means a bit of our own garden was in some strange fashion "a fairiness," Paul would have called it, smuggled indoors to lighten the heaviness of school hours; and while we wandered with eager, expectant feet in "The Child's Garden of Verses," we learned to love the maker of it, as does every honest-hearted child who hears his voice.

"It will be so good for her," said Mr. Glynn to mother. "She is all passion and imagination, and London is simply acting as a hot-bed. She is developing far too fast."

"What she wants is the society of chil-

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dren of her own age, and a little wholesome nursery discipline. I told you you could never keep it up."

Mr. Glynn gave a big sigh and followed mother out into the garden, saying, as he went, "It 's a delight to be with the chicks here, I feel ten years younger already. They 're such real children."

"Oh, they 're *real* enough," laughed mother, and they went out of earshot.

During this conversation I had been curled up in the deep window of the hall reading "Alice." Neither mother nor Mr. Glynn had remarked me, and as they were only passing through on their way to the garden I had not thought it necessary to make my presence known. I sat still for a long time pondering over what I had heard. I knew, of course, that our poet's daughter was coming to pay us a visit, but what did Mr. Glynn mean by saying that Fiametta — for that was the child's outlandish name — was "all passion"? What a dreadful

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child! I felt that she would be wiser not to fly into any passions here, for there was nurse! Paul was bad enough, she would certainly not stand another of them. Again, what did he mean by saying that we were "real children" in that emphatic way? Of course we were. The more I heard of grown-up people's conversation the more it struck me that they were given to making perfectly obvious statements with a solemn pedantry that was exasperating. Mr. Glynn was more intelligent than most of them, but it was evident that even he had his limitations. I uncurled my long legs and descended from the window-seat that I might seek Harry and discuss with him the best means of checking Fiametta's evidently far too frequent outbursts. But Harry had gone to play cricket with the vicarage boys, so I returned to "Alice," and forgot Fiametta entirely.

That night as nurse was brushing my hair before I went to bed, Mr. Glynn came

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into the nursery. It was one of his pleasant habits, — that he came to see us at all sorts of unexpected times. The sun, who did not go to bed anything like so early as I, was shining straight on my head, and Mr. Glynn, standing in the doorway, looked so pleased.

"Janey, you look just like a rosebud that has tumbled into the sun. Why do they tie up all that beautiful golden hair? It's positively wicked."

Nurse brushed harder than ever as she remarked primly, "Miss Jane 'ave so much 'air, sir, she 'd never be fit to be seen if it was n't plaited."

"Well, it 's a shame, Janey, and mind! no one is to tie up Fiametta's hair. You might as well be a pony going to the fair!"

"It 's very hot when it 's all about my face," I gasped, nurse really was brushing so hard.

"Well, I 'm glad I 've seen it, anyway. There 's the bell, I must run."

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Our family vigorously cultivated the sterner virtues, and considered the hardening process as essential to our welfare. It was only when I was with Mr. Glynn that I became less conscious of my many defects and realised that I, even I also, might be of some account.

One day, coming into the schoolroom where I was all alone, practising the "Merry Peasant," he came and stood behind me, laying his kind hands on my shoulders. I felt his fingers tighten as he said in such a queer voice, "Janey, will you be good to Fiametta? She is all I have. It is so hard to give her up even for one little month. If she is strange and unlike the rest of you, will you try to understand? Will you blame *me?* It is all my fault. Will you be kind to her, Janey?"

The "Merry Peasant" and the piano faded far away, as I felt myself brought face to face with something strong and intangible and infinitely dear. He turned my

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face back to him, and though everything was so misty, my eyes were not so dim but that I could see that his were full of tears.

"I will try," I whispered.

He took one of my stubby, grubby little hands and kissed it, saying, "I am quite happy now, Janey, for I know you will keep your word."

Then he went away, leaving me to practise the "Merry Peasant," while deep down in my heart I vowed that I would stand by Fiametta even as Harry stood by me. I would be a "gentleman" to Fiametta — and to this day I can think of no higher standard of conduct.

"Mind! Fiametta is not to have her hair tied up!" called our poet to me as he drove away from the hall door where we had all assembled to bid him farewell.

"I'm glad he's not a lecturing sort of man, like some of them," murmured Harry, when the carriage was out of sight. "He's

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a jolly decent sort of chap — if he *is* a poet," he added indulgently.

"You see," said Paul, "he's not both lit'ry *and* scientific, that's the bad kind."

"He did n't come to the society, he came to see us. It's those society people — " and Harry groaned.

Harry did not refer to the gay fashionables who are usually meant when one speaks of "society people"; the association he had in his mind flourished in the neighbouring town under the name of "Literary and Scientific Society." People coming to enlighten the members thereof had frequently stayed with us. Hence these tears.

"He's going to Norway, you know, then Fiametta is coming to stay with us. I do wonder what she will be like!"

"She 'll be like every other girl you've ever seen," Harry remarked, "I never can see any difference in girls."

I felt the implied snub, but was too wise to pursue the subject.

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II

FIAMETTA ARRIVES

Her eyes were like the wave within;
Like water reeds the poise
Of her soft body, dainty thin;
And like the water's noise
Her plaintive voice.

D. G. Rossetti

EVEN as I write I feel again the thump of my thick pig-tail on my back as I take the schoolroom stairs in a flying leap. A leap, which, while it sent the blood coursing through my veins in the joy of motion always left me uncomfortably conscious that my legs and my frock were out of proportion, and that it was the legs which were to blame. A large hole in the knee of my stocking, aggressively conspicuous — and that in spite of a liberal application of schoolroom ink to the knee itself — only served to empha-

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sise a resentful feeling we occasionally bore towards our own members. Did they not take what seemed to be an irresponsible and malignant pleasure in getting us into trouble with the authorities? How else could one account for so many and unforeseen contingencies?

Three several bumps followed mine, as the boys with the egotism of their sex shouldered past me, having pulled me back by my hair, that they might be first to reach the red baize door leading to the hall, while three-year-old Lucy, fresh from the hands of nurse and reproachfully tidy, brought up the rear.

Once collected on the door-step we stood in an expectant row awaiting the arrival of that unknown, much surmised little girl with the strange, foreign name, whom the authorities kept warning us to treat tenderly. Our mental attitude was, in consequence of these repeated warnings, coldly critical. We were not unprepared to dis-

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approve of the stranger thus thrust upon us; my promise to her father kept me silent as to my forebodings, but there was little time to ventilate our opinions, for even as we arranged ourselves, the dog-cart, with mother upright and capable upon the box, bowled up the drive and our visitor was in our midst.

There was no shyness in her greeting as she shook hands with us in what we instantly resented as a "grown-up sort of way."

Let me look at you, Fiametta, and try to picture you as you struck me that first afternoon!

A slim, brown child of ten, with oval face and curious parti-coloured hair; hair, that in its shadows was dark as the oak settle in the hall, and that the sunshine burnished into brightness, gleaming golden as the new brass harness of father's best cart-horse.

All Fiametta's frocks were blue, an al-

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most atmospheric blue, dark yet intense; they fell in soft lines about her body. She never wore stiff, starchy clothes like mine which when first put on would resemble the skirts of a ballet-dancer in their brevity and the abrupt angle they made with my waistband. Fiametta's frocks were certainly short, but they seemed to clothe her infinitely more than mine did me. I know now why it was. Then I was only conscious of an uncomfortable difference in our appearance, a difference as perplexing as it was annoying.

"Now, Janey, take your little friend and show her the schoolroom and the nursery and the room she is to share with you," said mother; then, turning to Fiametta, "You 'll soon feel at home here, my dear, and it will be nice for you to have other children to play with."

"Will it?" asked Fiametta, dubiously, as mother drew me forward. I held out my hand to her in silence and we climbed the

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front stairs together. Paul and Harry, who had been staring at the new-comer much as they had stared at the new Himalaya ram, departed through the green baize door again to discuss events in leisured ease in the harness room.

"What slippery stairs!" exclaimed Fiametta, clutching at me. "Don't you often fall down?"

"We hardly ever use these stairs, these are mother's."

"How funny to have lots of separate stairs. We've only one where I live; but then there's only Daddie and me. Oh, what a pretty room!"

I felt gratified. Fiametta had rushed to the open window and was hanging over the sill, burying her nose in the Gloire de Dijon roses that surrounded it.

"This is where we shall sleep. Here's your bed and here's mine."

She drew her head in from the window and came to sit beside me on the bed. "My

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Daddie says I shall love you," she remarked. Then, throwing her arms round my neck — "and I hope I shall. Please try to love me!" This time there was a timid questioning ring in the voice which was appealing. The boys were not there, so I kissed her and in token of my friendship volunteered to show her my dolls. To my joy I found that she was sound on the subject of dolls, and had brought two with her, quite superior specimens rejoicing in names which at the time I made no attempt to pronounce.

Presently nurse came to unpack Fiametta's clothes. Lucy came too and pursued her silent investigation of our guest unquestioned, for Fiametta noticed her not at all.

She possessed what seemed to me an endless number of frocks; most of them of the same soft, thin, woollen stuff she was wearing, and all of them blue, that curious blue.

"Which is your Sunday frock, Miss?"

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asked nurse, looking somewhat disapprovingly at the heap of blue garments on the bed.

"I don't wear a different frock on Sundays to other days. Why should I?"

"Don't you have a best frock and hat for church, Miss?" nurse asked sharply.

"I never go to church," Fiametta answered indifferently, "it bores Dad."

Nurse gasped, while I felt a thrill of pleasant excitement and wished that Harry were present at these revelations. This visitor of ours was evidently full of surprises.

"You'll have to go to church here, Miss, anyway. I never heard of such a thing!" and nurse muttered angrily to herself as she hung up the blue frocks in the big lavender-scented wardrobe.

Fiametta, seated on the end of the bed swinging her slim feet and humming a tune, watched her unconcernedly as she said, "Oh, yes! I'll go to church here

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with all of you. Dad said I'd have to; he went, and says it's such a pretty church. You see it's country here and so one has more time for these things."

Nurse turned and glared at this audacious child. "I think you're as heathenish as your name!" she exclaimed, and stalked out of the room.

"What a strange person!" mused Fiametta in a tone of polite wonder that was most impressive. "What did she mean about my name? It is the beautiful name of a beautiful lady. I'm going to be a beautiful lady when I am grown up. I shall be a columbine, I think, or a fairy princess."

This calm assumption was unbearable, so I asked incredulously, "How do you know?"

Fiametta smiled the conscious smile of one who is the repository of an agreeable secret. "My Daddie says so, and he knows all about that sort of thing because he is a

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poet. He has written lots of poetry about me."

"He wrote a poem about Lucy when he was here," I interrupted; Fiametta must not think she was the only subject for poetry in the world.

She turned to gaze long and earnestly at little fat Lucy, who lolled against the end of the bed sucking her thumb as she stared unwinkingly at our guest. Fiametta sighed, as who should say the ways of poets are past comprehending; then "with an air" she said, "*Did* he? How funny of Dad!"

I don't know why it was, but at that moment I felt a strong desire to slap Fiametta.

Just then Miss Goodlake, who had an extravagant admiration for Mr. Glynn, came to be introduced to his daughter. I saw that she too was impressed by Fiametta's manner, but it did not seem to annoy her. They talked together all tea-time in quite company fashion, and after-

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wards Fiametta went out with her to see the garden. Harry pulled me back as I was about to follow them. "Let the kids go," he whispered, "stop here a minute and tell me what she's like."

"You saw."

"Oh, that's nothing; that's all swagger. What's she really like?"

"I can't tell yet," I replied cautiously. "She's not a bit shy, anyhow."

"I should think she just is n't; why, she jawed away like a visitor."

"Well, so she is."

"You know very well what I mean. She seems a queer sort of kid, but I don't think she's the whiney-piney sort."

"Oh, no, I don't think she's that kind."

"Not like these vicarage girls?"

Now the vicarage girls were particular friends of mine, so I resented the implication involved. In the heated argument that followed, we lost sight of the original subject of our conversation, only to be recalled

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to it by the reappearance of Fiametta herself, to present to us sundry gifts which her father had sent. Many-bladed knives for Harry and Paul, a lovely cow that "mooed" for Lucy, and for me a little ivory purse with my initials in silver. No one but Mr. Glynn would have thought of sending me anything so beautiful; it was more beautiful than any even mother had got, and as I looked at it I seemed to hear him saying, "If she is strange and unlike the rest of you, will you try to understand?" I really did try; but of the two it was Fiametta who seemed most at ease.

When we had duly gloated over our gifts I escorted Fiametta "round the place" as father called it, and found her enthusiastic admiration very gratifying. As we rounded the last bend of the drive and came full upon the house standing four square and hospitable in its soft setting of gay garden and great elms, Fiametta stopped short and looked gravely at it lying before us in the

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rosy evening light. Then she said softly, "What a friendly looking house!"

For a moment I could not answer; suddenly I felt a lump in my throat, and unbidden, wholly unexpected tears rushed to my eyes, as for the first time in my life I consciously realised how passionately dear to us was this same "friendly looking" house. Like most of Fiametta's criticisms, the words were curiously apt. A big, straggling, two-storied gabled house, "built onto" by some twenty generations of prosperous, slow-thinking, kindly Garsetshire squires, each one careful to disturb in no way the work of his forbears, yet each anxious in his turn to leave "the place" a roomier, more comfortable habitation than he had found it. Every window was big, stone mullioned, and in summer framed in fragrant vegetation. There was hardly a square foot of wall to be seen on the whole house, and from the scarlet gladness of japonica in May to the crimson glories of

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the Virginia creeper in October, there was a continual succession of colour and sweetness the whole summer through. Frail, faithful monthly-roses often blooming at Christmas, while now, in June, wistaria, honeysuckle, and every sort of climbing-rose rioted over the walls striving to push their way through the ever-open windows, that they might make the house as beautiful inside as out.

We, none of us children, I mean, ever wanted to go away from the Court. On one occasion, after some illness, we had been taken by Miss Goodlake to a place known ever after in derision as the "silly seaside," where such sea as there was took its departure for hours together, leaving an immense expanse of evil-smelling mud in its stead; where rooms were small and stuffy, and an "out of doors," peopled by no kindly pastoral creatures other than certain ill-used-looking donkeys, held few charms for us. When we had been there a fort-

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night father came down to see how we were getting on, and just as he arrived the sea "went home."

All afternoon father walked about the beach and sniffed dubiously. At tea-time he remarked upon the curious smell to Miss Goodlake who explained that it was the "ozone."

Father gave an indescribable grunt. "That's what you call it, is it? Well, we've a different name for it where I come from." And to our immense joy he took us all home next day. But this is a digression.

As Fiametta and I reached the side door, which as children we always used, Paul appeared in his nightgown leaning out from a window overhead. "Listen!" he cried, "the Minster will sing in a moment!"

The tall clock in the hall struck eight, and forthwith into the scented stillness, across the sunset-lighted fields there floated a melody! Note upon note of liquid sweet-

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ness; harmonious thirds and fifths and plaintive threnodies; the mellow sweetness of old bells; the cathedral chimes. Four several songs they sang four times a day, that when men heard them busy folk might pause and thank God that He had set them in so goodly a country.

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III

ONE SUNDAY

The Sabbath peace is in the slumbrous trees.

W. E. Henley

"WELL, little blue maid! are you coming to church with the others?" It was father who spoke as Fiametta joined us in the drive that sunny Sunday morning, her first with us. For answer, she thrust her little gloved hand into his, and they walked away together in contented silence. Father, as he said of himself, was "a man of few words"; but Fiametta, although she had not been four and twenty hours amongst us, had already discovered that the big silent squire was a sure refuge for the troubled or perplexed. Even now, when in a market town I chance to see a broad-shouldered figure with trim gaiters and thick, square-toed boots, I seem to feel again the big warm hand close over

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mine, with that firm clasp, so infinitely reassuring. Through the haze of years it is not what my father said that I remember so much as the infinite comfort of his presence. It was so safe and restful to be with father.

There was a good deal to perplex Fiametta and much to trouble us that Sunday morning. Our attempts at amusement during the past week had been unusually unlucky; never before had Miss Goodlake seemed so ubiquitous, or opportunities of getting wet and dirty so numerous. And now, with what I have heard a learned scientist describe as "the innate malevolence of inanimate objects," Harry was in disgrace because an abominable fence had retained the seat of his Eton trousers not half an hour ago, and he was walking shamefaced in week-day garb with mother. Moreover the first really lovely day that summer was Sunday. Truly the ways of Providence are inscrutable!

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An all-too-short five minutes brought us to the church porch, where we stood to watch the sunshine silvering the distant Severn till the bell ceased clanging. Then into the cool darkness of the grey old church, to note with wistful eyes the golden patch of gravel-path seen through the open door.

Our seat was set sideways just below the pulpit. This position, and the fact that we had to turn round, one behind the other, in a long tail, during the creed, filled me with modest pride. It gave distinction to the family — we and the choir being the only worshippers so placed as to render such change of pose necessary. In childhood any opportunity for movement is a thing to be thankful for, and for the position of our pew we thanked the Fates.

At first Fiametta, who sat with me at the end of the seat near the centre aisle, was much interested. I found her places for her and she followed the service with

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commendable attention. But unfortunately it was a Litany Sunday, and the incessant "We besich Thee to yer us good Lard" seemed to get on Fiametta's nerves. First, she rose from her knees and sat down. Then in spite of warning tugs from me she stood right up murmuring pleadingly, "Oh, not again! Oh, not again!" Finally, to my horror, she pattered gaily down the aisle and out through the open door into the sunshine, where she paused.

Breathless I leant over the end of the pew to see what she would do next. Father slept peacefully in his corner as he always did during the Litany. Mother knelt with her face buried in her hands, repeating the responses in her intense, low voice. Harry and Paul turned right round, peering between the bent shoulders of our neighbours to see what had happened. And a good many other people turned too.

Once in the sunshine Fiametta stood quite still, but she never looked round.

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Suddenly she threw her arms over her head. There was a swirl of blue draperies, a gleam of black silk stockings, as, with a swiftness born of long practice, she turned catherine-wheels on the path till she vanished from our sight.

The choir, who saw what I saw, faltered in their next "We besich Thee," while the parson endeared himself to us forever-more by turning very red and choking. From that day we felt that there was a deal of human nature in parson. Paul, who had watched the whole proceeding with great interest and admiration, turned to me amazed and gasping, to whisper "Did n't her do it well?" When Paul was excited he always relapsed into the vernacular. Even the Litany on a hot Sunday morning cannot last forever, and when mother at length lifted her head, it was to discover that one of her flock was missing.

"Is Fiametta ill?" she whispered to me,

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leaning across the boys. "Why did n't you go after her or tell me?"

"Oh, *she 's* not ill," whispered Harry in return. "She 's gone because she was tired of it." Mother frowned but looked rather relieved all the same.

Sometimes I wonder if the vicar knew how anxious we were to follow Fiametta, for the sermon was unusually short. We had to wake father.

Once outside the churchyard gates we children tore across the village green past the old runic cross standing where three roads meet, and into our own drive, where we found Fiametta wheeling six dolls in the gardener's wheelbarrow.

"What did you bolt out of church for?" demanded Harry sternly. It was annoying to think that she should have been thus disporting herself while we were cooped up in church.

"I was getting essasperated," she rejoined in that cool, superior tone which so

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"essasperated" us, "and my Daddie says that when you are essasperated it is safest to go away; so I went."

"Will you pitchypole again?" asked Paul insinuatingly. "You do it as nice as the clown in Powell's circus."

"It 's quite easy — see!" And again the lithe, active blue figure flung itself into the ambient air, and over, over, again and again, till she alighted at mother's feet just as that lady was entering the drive gate.

"My dear child! You really must not do that. It is all very well for boys, but for a little girl — You quite shock me!"

Mother certainly looked shocked. Father said nothing, but his eyes twinkled as he stood with his hands in his pockets leaning against the gate post.

"My Daddie taught me to do it," said Fiametta, in an offended tone. "We used to do it on wet Sundays in Mr. Raymond's

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studio. He said it's good exercise, and I can do it so fast that my skirts never fall over my head — never at all."

This was true.

Mother was plainly in a dilemma; much as she disapproved of any girl turning catherine-wheels, she even more strongly disapproved of seeming to criticise Mr. Glynn to his own daughter, so she said gently, "Well, dear, don't do it on Sunday here; and why did you go out of church before the service was finished? You must n't do that."

"I was tired. I'm not used to such long churches. *You* slept," she added, turning to father, "I heard you."

No member of our family had ever dared so much as to suggest to father that he occasionally snored in church. He turned very red and taking one hand out of his pocket slapped his leg exclaiming, "God bless my soul! Why ever did n't somebody wake me?"

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"It was a very little noise," said Fiametta consolingly; "it did n't matter."

"Go and get ready for lunch, children!" said mother after a pause, during which the united gaze of the family had been centred upon Fiametta. We turned to go, but she took father's hand and laid it against her cheek, saying, "Was it unkind of me to say you slept? I never will again, for I love you."

Father stooped down hastily and kissed her, saying, "There, little maid! There!"

It was a good deal for father to say; and Fiametta seemed perfectly satisfied, for at lunch she was not in the least subdued but chattered incessantly the whole time. After lunch we all went to sit in the schoolroom, for the rain came down in torrents. Miss Goodlake had a class in the Sunday school, so we were left to amuse ourselves with books; for on Sundays all games, save those invented and played in secret, were forbidden.

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A Romance of the Nursery

"Of all the beastly books that ever were written, this is the beastliest!" exclaimed Harry, slamming the offending volume down on the schoolroom table; "why on earth we should only be allowed to read that old Maria Edgeworth on Sundays I can't think. It's bad enough that two of us should be called after her idiotic children!"

"What's it about?" asked Fiametta, who was sitting at the open window sniffing the roses.

"Oh, about two miserable kids who always wanted to know *useful* things about thermometers and sundials and gages and g'ography; and people always answer 'em in the long-windedest jawing fashion, and they're as pleased as punch, and then we're told that they were so 'intelligent'—*little beasts!*" and Harry thumped the table again with mother's cherished copy of "Harry and Lucy." "There's only one book I hate worse than this," he continued, "and that's 'Frank'!"

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One Sunday

Paul, seated on the floor in a corner with a heavy calf-bound book upon his knee, lifted his head at the noise.

"You can read the Bible. It 's interesting enough — lots of fighting and killing!" and down went his head again.

No one knew exactly how Paul had learnt to read. I don't think he knew himself. He had seemed to read as other children speak, — by instinct; and he read every thing he came across with an entire absorption that was rather irritating to the rest of us.

"It does n't seem quite the thing to read the Bible for pleasure, just as if it was a story book," Harry said sententiously.

But Paul made no answer, for he wandered with Ezekiel "in the midst of the valley which was full of bones." In the silence which followed Harry's last remark we heard him muttering "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

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"Read it out," commanded Fiametta. "It is poetry. My Daddie often says it to me."

How vivid are some pictures of the past! I see the dear, shabby old schoolroom with the square stone-mullioned window, through which the roses thrust their gracious heads, their scent mingling with that of the freshly moistened earth. I hear the soft patter of the summer rain in subdued accompaniment to the grave child-voice of my little brother as he reads. Harry laid his head down on his arms to listen. Fiametta, wide-eyed as one who sees a vision, held my hand so tight that I almost cried out.

"And the heathen shall know that I, the Lord, do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them forevermore."

Paul's voice ceased, and for a full minute there was no sound in the room. Then Fiametta sighed, shook her hair back from her face, and whispered, "Forevermore."

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One Sunday

Paul scrambled up from the floor and laid his big shabby Bible on the shelf, crying gaily, "It 's stopped raining, let 's go and get father to come round to the stables!"

In another minute the schoolroom was deserted; for to walk with father "round the place" on Sunday afternoon, was the one form of Sabbatarian exercise which we whole-heartedly approved.

Mother always came to see us in bed on Sundays. She went to the little ones every night to hear them say their prayers, but Harry and I were considered old enough to manage without mother; besides, we went to bed just as she went to dinner. On Sundays, however, she came to hear us repeat such hymns and portions of Scripture as we had learned during the week.

With some complacency I repeated the whole of the famous chapter on Charity without a mistake. She kissed me and turning to Fiametta who was sitting on the bed, her long arms clasped round her

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knees, asked, "Can you say a hymn for me, dear?"

Fiametta unclasped her arms and standing upright on her bed said graciously, "I will say you one of my Daddie's favourites. I'm afraid I may forget it if I don't say it out sometimes."

Then she began and the "hymn" she recited was Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel." My knowledge of poetry was extremely limited and I had never heard any poetry in the least like that. I understood but little of it, yet the passionate cadences of the child's voice thrilled me.

"'There will I ask of Christ, the Lord,
Thus much for him and me;
Only to live as once on earth
With love, — only to be,
As then awhile, forever now
Together, I and he.'"

Her voice broke and I knew that she was thinking of her father, even though at the moment she herself was the Blessed Damozel.

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The last vibrating echoes of the young voice died away and mother said gravely, "Thank you, my dear. It is a very beautiful poem, but I should hardly call it a hymn!"

"Perhaps not," said Fiametta indifferently, "most hymns are rather dull and often very bad verse."

Mother kissed her, and somewhat hastily bade us good-night. Somehow grown-up people showed less anxiety to instruct Fiametta than the rest of us.

As mother closed the door a small figure crept from behind the towel-rail, exclaiming, "Oh, say it all again, every bit, and I'll give you my white rat!"

It was Paul. Across the passage he had heard what—from its length—he concluded was some sort of a "story," and had noiselessly crept in to enjoy what I have long since come to look upon as a piece of consummate artistry.

"Come onto my bed and I'll say it for

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you without any white rats," said Fiametta magnanimously. "You should see the pictures of her! — I 'm rather like her," she added complacently. "I shall be exactly like her when I am grown up!"

Paul opened his great eyes and shook his head, saying, "I don't believe she had piebald hair, anyway. I think she was like the fair Persian in your blue book."

"Well, I 've seen her portrait, lots of her portraits, and you have n't, so I ought to know," said Fiametta in a huffy voice.

"And is she like you?" jeered Paul, "is she a skinny little brown—" Paul finished his sentence on the floor, for Fiametta, "essasperated," had given him a violent push; the thud, together with the raising of Paul's voice, brought nurse, who indignantly marched him off to bed.

To get up at night to look at the sky seemed to me an astonishing thing to do. It was one more example of what Paul called Fiametta's "curousness." That first

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One Sunday

Sunday night, quite contrary to custom, I awoke; perhaps because the moon was shining full on my face.

Fiametta was standing at the open window apparently talking to herself, — or was it to herself?

I lay still and listened. She seemed to be apostrophising some one far away, and presently I discovered that she was holding an imaginary conversation with her father.

"Dear Dad!" she said, "you can't see the sky to-night, because the sun shines all the time where you are, that's why you thought it would not be good for me. But I can see the kind moon and the patient stars and I love you. I wish you were here to rub your beard against my face. Such a funny beard you've got!" Her voice broke and I saw the tears on her cheeks shining in the moonlight. I jumped out of bed and ran to the window, saying shyly, "Are you homesick, Fiametta?"

She cuddled up against me. "I want my

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Daddie, Janey, that 's all. We always look at the sky together; night is such a beautiful time. It 's very beautiful here because there are scents, and hushified sounds as well."

"Are you never afraid at night?" I asked with a little shiver, the garden and the drive looked so ghostly and unfamiliar, the shrubbery so vast and impenetrable.

"No! I love the night time, God takes extra care of us then. Listen! this is what my Daddie likes me to say to him when we look at the stars together."

"Is it poetry?" I asked anxiously. Fiametta seemed to be able to repeat volumes and volumes of poetry, and in the middle of the night my flesh was weak.

"Yes, it 's poetry, though I suppose *you 'd* call it 'Bible verses,' but I sha'n't say it now," and Fiametta drew herself out of my embrace.

"Don't you think," I asked meekly,

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"that we had better get back into our beds?" It was unfortunate to have offended Fiametta, but a worse thing might befall.

"All right," she said with surprising docility, "Dad said I was n't to expect too much of you, so I won't."

What could Mr. Glynn have meant?

With a bunch of honeysuckle crushed against her face Fiametta was soon quite quiet in her little white bed. But I was unused to these nocturnal musings, and it was long before I could settle into a comfortable position; things puzzled me. Just as I was dropping off to sleep Fiametta called out, "Janey! What's piebald?"

Paul's speech still rankled.

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IV

PAUL'S PILGRIMAGE

Once on a time
There was a little boy: a master-mage
By virtue of a book of magic — O, so magical it filled
His life with visionary pomps
Processional! And Powers
Passed with him where he passed. And Thrones
And Dominations, glaived and plumed and mailed,
Thronged in the criss-cross streets,
The palaces pell-mell with playing-fields,
Domes, cloisters, dungeons, caverns, tents, arcades,
Of the unseen, silent city, in his soul
Pavilioned jealously, and hid
As in the dusk, profound,
Green stillnesses of some enchanted mere.

W. E. Henley

"PAUL isn't a bit good looking," Fiametta said one day, "but he has got the kind of face you want to look at again. I wonder how it is!"

Other people wondered the same thing, but the fact remained that Paul attracted attention. He was "noticed" and by

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people who were by no means fond of children as a rule. Like Fiametta, he did not know what shyness meant. He looked the whole world in the face, and the world looked back at him and smiled. Perhaps it was because his world was so entirely of his own creating that it wore for him so pleasant an aspect. Life, for him, meant one long pageant which could never under any circumstances become monotonous because it was so full of surprises. From his very babyhood the Angel-Playmate had wandered with him hand in hand. At three years old he informed us that he went every day to a "magic place" where there "was no nannas and all kinds of fruits ripe at the same time."

It appeared that every afternoon after nursery dinner, when he was put to bed for a siesta, there came a balloon to the night nursery window, into which he stepped and was promptly wafted to his "magic place." There he enjoyed himself exceedingly for

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an hour or so, returning the way he had gone.

I was four years older than Paul, and inclined to be influenced by Harry's scepticism; yet the tale was most convincing, and no amount of cross-questioning discovered any discrepancies in his evidence. At last Harry, who was nothing if not practical, exclaimed, "But there are bars in front of the nursery window!"

"I can squeege froo ve bars and ve balloon waits for me outside."

Off we hurried with Paul to the night nursery to put this statement to the test. With some difficulty he climbed onto the deep window seat, and thence out onto the window ledge.

It was quite true; he could get through the bars. He always was a thin little boy, was Paul!

Just as he had accomplished this feat, and was standing grinning at us triumphantly from the outside, mother opened

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the door which faced the window. For a minute she stood quite still, and her face seemed very white; then she crossed the room to the window, saying quietly, "Come in again, Baby, and let mother see how you do it."

Paul "squeeged" through the way he had gone out and mother caught him in her arms, exclaiming, "My little son! O my little son!" but she did not scold him.

That afternoon more bars were put in front of both nursery windows so that even the thinnest little boy could not "squeege froo."

On asking Paul somewhat derisively how that would affect his magic place, he answered cheerfully, "Oh, ve *balloon* can get froo all right, and it comes for me just ve same. But it only holds one."

I suppose that we were what is called "strictly brought up"; that is to say we had to do what we were told or punishment

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followed disobedience as surely as bedtime followed nursery tea. We had stated times for appearing downstairs, and were expected upon all occasions to use the back staircase. Harry and I were not particularly enterprising children, and up to Paul's arrival had passed our time in monotonously virtuous peace, content with such excursions into the unlawful as occurred to our by no means vivid imaginations. But from the moment that Paul began to walk the possibilities of wrong-doing increased tenfold, and we seemed born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. He was, nurse said, the naughtiest and most "mishtiful" baby she had ever held in her arms. Whenever anything displeased him he roared and beat whatever happened to be within reach. If reproved at meals he flung his plate upon the floor, and when lifted down, preparatory to being put in the corner, he danced upon the fragments. From his earliest articulate moments his powers of

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vituperation were surprising, and with Paul action invariably followed close upon the word; and yet, between the storms, he was the sunniest soul alive, and there was no doubt that in her heart of hearts nurse loved him even better than the placid Lucy.

When Paul discovered that he could read — and, as I said before, reading seemed to come to him as speech comes to ordinary children — he became less "mishtiful," but more than ever given to pretendings. He also infected us to such an extent that we all three lived in a world where marvellous happenings were to be looked for as regularly as the nursery meals. One day, soon after he could spell through "Dick Whittington," in a gorgeously illustrated "Toy Book," Paul was a-missing.

Nurse had taken Lucy, then in the long-clothes stage, for a walk; we never joined in these perambulations if we could possibly help it, and on this occasion we were

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allowed to remain behind to work in our gardens. Paul had a garden, but in spite of his frequent assertions that he would be a farmer when he was "growed up," his notions of horticulture were rather chaotic. However, he started to work beside us. Having pulled up by the roots his few remaining plants to see how they were progressing, the labour of putting them back struck him as unnecessary and uninteresting, and it occurred to him it would be more exciting to "seek his fortune." He did not harrow our feelings by bidding us farewell, but went off quietly, and as Harry and I were engaged in extensive alterations we never missed him.

A few days before, he had accompanied father on some business he had at the Docks; so having seized upon the smallest and lightest kitten (he had tried the cat "but she hanged over so and were so heavy") to complete his resemblance to the great Whittington, he simply followed the river.

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Paul's Pilgrimage

Two miles, long winding miles, by field and water-meadow, seems a long walk to a lonely little boy, however big his purpose; but country children are used to run about all day, and when they are tired the kind earth nurses them on her lap till they are rested. Paul sat down from time to time, for the day was hot and the kitten was hot "and very mewey." At last he came to the beginning of the Docks just as a big bell was clanging, and the workmen were hurrying to their dinner. Paul leaned against a capstan till the "crowd had passed," and the great ships lay silent in the hot midday sun. Then he toddled on till he came to what he afterwards described as a "lower ship, wivout masts," where a man sat in the bows eating bread and cheese.

The sight of the bread and cheese reminded Paul of dinner time, and for a moment he wavered. Then he tucked the ever-slipping kitten more firmly under his

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arm, and strode — I know he strode — forward to the edge of the wharf.

"Do you want a cabin-boy?" he asked of the cheese-eating man.

The man took a large mouthful and looked at Paul; then he said slowly as he munched, "I don't know as I do, — not partic'lur. Was you thinking of trying for the pleace?"

"I want to seek my fortune," Paul answered firmly.

"Oh, you does, do you? Well, you come aboard and we'll see if as it can be done."

The captain (Paul always called him "the captain") of the "Lighter Llanthony" reached over for Paul and the kitten, and they trod the deck together, for Paul was as glad to put that kitten down as the kitten was to breathe freely once more.

"Be you 'ungry?" demanded the captain.

"Can I sweep or clean anything for my dinner?" Paul asked anxiously, to show that he was "a honest boy."

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The captain made the "curiousest noise" in his throat, and slapped his leg. All Garsetshire people slap their leg when their feelings overcome them. Then he scratched his chin and stared at Paul, who was wondering whether the fact that the strap of his shoe lacked a button and flapped in an untidy fashion, would go against him, the button having come off during his pilgrimage.

"Supposing us do 'ave a bit o' nunch fust?" said the man at last.

"He was a nice man," said Paul afterwards. "He gave me water in a can, and it tasted so good of tar, and he gave me ever such a piece of cheese! Oh, it was good!"

Presently two gentlemen, walking on the wharf, stopped just opposite the "Lighter Llanthony," and Paul affably remarked to his host, "There 's Sir William."

Sir William heard the clear little voice, and turned with some curiosity to see who

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it was that recognised him. Like everybody else he had "noticed" Paul whenever he came to our house, and his big deerhound, Brenda, was one of Paul's most intimate friends, — she had already leapt lightly on board to greet him.

"What on earth are you doing here, you youngster?" bawled Sir William, hurrying after his dog.

Paul began to have misgivings. Other people might not share the delicacy of his host in the matter of asking questions.

"'E be come for to seek 'is fartun," said the captain gravely, as he lounged over in the direction of the inquiring voice. "'E 've brought 'is cat along!"

Paul, sitting tight on a coil of rope, lay low, like Brer Rabbit, and said nothing. But Sir William grasped the situation in a flash. He was not so old or so stout as to have forgotten his classics, so he, too, slapped his leg and laughed a jolly laugh as he

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cried, "Thrice Lord Mayor of London, hey?"

The captain of the "Lighter Llanthony" went ashore and had quite a long conversation with Sir William, "and they laughed a lot," Paul said in rather an injured voice. But Brenda lay down on the deck beside Paul, and put her nose on his lap, sniffing indulgently at the kitten who was mewing more dismally than ever, for it was long past her dinner time, and she had no opinion of tarry water nor yet of bread and cheese.

The end of it all was, that just as messengers were preparing to scour the country in search of Paul, Sir William drove up with him on the front seat of the dog-cart, a limp, dejected-looking kitten seated on his lap.

During his conversation with father and mother Sir William slapped his leg more than once. We watched their parleying from the orchard, where we had been sent to play.

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Paul was regarded as something of a hero until after tea, when the would-be Dick Whittington was borne wailing to bed.

We none of us went to seek our fortune for some time after that.

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V

LUCY

Such a 'dicl'us, dumpty, three years' thing
To have such settled views.

ANON.

"MISS LUCY be the very moral o' squoire," said the household. She was absolutely and serenely good-tempered, calm and deliberate in all her small doings, with big moon face and grave grey eyes, which, on occasion, looked absurdly like father's.

There was no doubt about it, she was more like father than any of the rest of us. She always knew her own mind and her loves were decided and unswerving. I don't think she disliked any living thing, and certainly the inhabitants of that sunshiny small world wherein she dwelt responded to her affection. Even the grim gardener,

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"old and serious, brown and big," relaxed his guardianship of the peaches when Lucy toddled down the trim path by the south wall, caught his gnarled hand in both her own, saying, persuasively, "Give Lucy a nice wipe peatz?"

But the gardener was not Lucy's greatest friend. No whit behind the rest of us in selecting one person for special adoration, her choice had fallen upon Dutton, the old coachman, and her regard was fully returned.

Their mutual devotion was the odder in that Dutton was by no means a genial person, nor was he at all given to lenient judgments where children were concerned. He always spoke of Harry and Paul as "mishtiful young varmints," and of me as "a sad tomboy of a maid." He taught us all to ride, and was very strict and grumpy during the process; hit Harry and Paul over the legs with his crop if he saw any daylight, and offended Fiametta so

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deeply on the one occasion he took her out on the pony, that she positively declined to mount again. He was a portly, masterful person, who always spoke of "my 'orses," and "my kerridges"; in fact, it was years before it dawned upon us that any member of the family ever rode or drove except by favour of Dutton, and, considering his imposing and unapproachable omnipotence, we thought it quite surprising that he allowed it as often as he did.

Four generations of Duttons had been coachman at the Court, and it was something of a grief to the present holder of that post, that his only son was a sergeant-major in a cavalry regiment in far Râl-Pindi, who showed no desire to return to the family profession. He was, however, immensely proud of this son, and when we wanted to roast potatoes at the harness-room fire, we used to go and ask tenderly after the welfare of "Major Dutton" — dropping the sergeant — and the old man

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almost always unbent sufficiently to allow the feast to take place.

Fresh-coloured, clean and trim, whether in his wrinkleless livery and top-boots, —

". . . The bravest tops
That market-town, a town of tops, could show,"

or in a stable jacket, or even in his turned-back, whitest of shirt-sleeves, he was the smartest-looking coachman I have ever had the luck to behold. And father said that he knew more about horses than any "vet" in the home counties.

The other servants always spoke of him as "Mr. Dutton"; grooms and stable boys cringed and trembled before him, and we, with the exception of Lucy, regarded him with a sort of respectful dislike, greatly mixed, however, with admiration. "He was *so* pompshus."

Docile and obedient in every other respect, Lucy could not be kept away from any sort of animal within touching

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distance; pigs, cows, horses, had for her an irresistible fascination, and to be in the neighbourhood of any such without proceeding to "stloke" them was to her impossible. She was absolutely without fear, and no amount of reprimands or warnings had any sort of effect. One day, just as she had learned to walk, nurse brought her into the stable yard to give a message to Dutton. The four-stall stable door was open, for Dutton was inside; seeing this, Lucy broke from nurse and ran straight in among the horses' feet before any one realised what she was going to do. Of course nurse screamed and dashed after her, but Dutton had already picked her up from under the hind legs of a particularly lively young "riding 'ack" father had recently bought for mother. Dutton's face was white as his whiskers, but he waved nurse off, exclaiming, "Now don't you go for to frighten the hinfant. I 'll take 'er round the 'orses, an' by and by she 'll ride as

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straight as the missus, for she 'll never know fear! Don't you go a-screechin' and putting false idees into this hinfant's 'ed! 'Alf the childring 's *made* nervous."

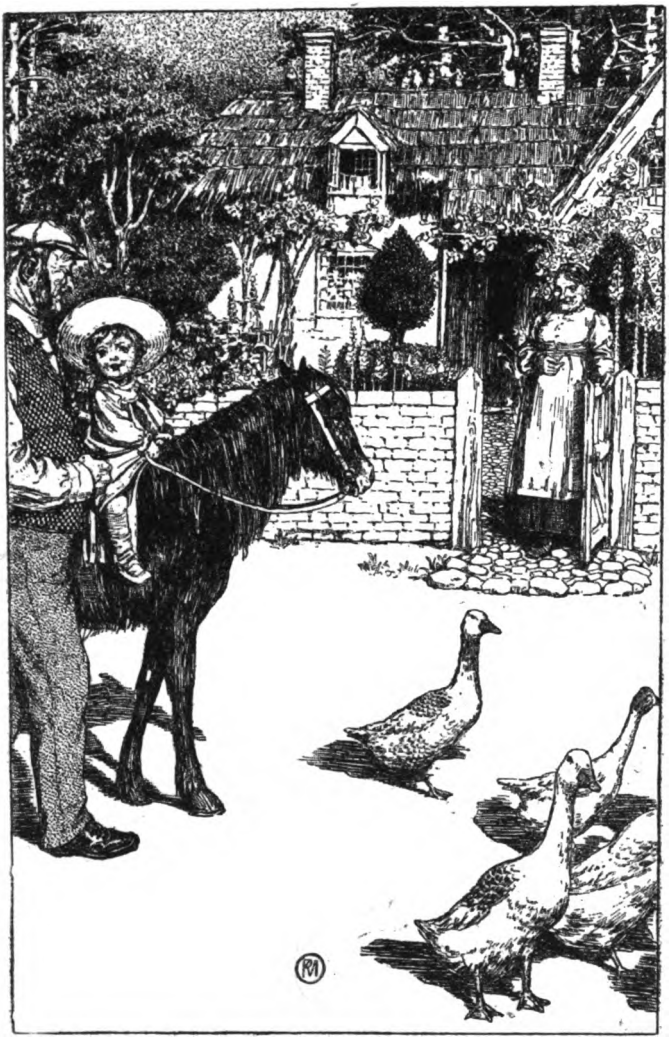
So Lucy was carried round the stables there and then, and allowed to "stloke" the horses to her heart's content, whereupon she conceived a violent love for Dutton, and that night wept and refused to go to bed until he came and stood in the stable yard and waved to her. So that it became an established custom for Dutton, if at home, to stand and wave a farewell to Lucy, as she was carried to bed at six. One staircase window looked out over the yard, and there nurse had to take her stand with Lucy in her arms, while Dutton, the dignified, waved like a schoolboy, and Lucy blew kisses to him in rapturous recognition.

On winter nights the shining of the stable lamps contented her.

Nurse, like the rest of the servants,

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It came about that Lucy and Dutton spent every Sunday morning together.

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regarded Dutton with considerable awe, so that when he commanded her to bring the "hinfant" to him on the very next Sunday morning while the family were at church, she never dreamt of disobeying, or even of consulting mother as to the propriety of such a course. Thus it came about that Lucy and Dutton spent every Sunday morning together, when he would carry her into all the stables, seat her on every horse in turn, make her hold out a lump of sugar on a wee flat palm to such amiable old horses as were thoroughly trustworthy, finally taking her for a ride on Fanny, the Shetland pony, to visit Mrs. Dutton at their cottage; and we envied her this last treat most of all.

Mrs. Dutton was one of those rare persons who instinctively, at the right moment, and without any fuss, divine that hungry travellers find seed cake very sustaining; that bread and dripping eaten secretly in a tool-house may, on a wet

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afternoon, raise such wayfarers to a pinnacle of happiness unattainable on days of common fineness; that when a jacket is turned inside out, and a hat lacking a brim is pulled well over the ears, the wearer of such habiliments is disguised, and greatly appreciates being mistaken for a regular mendicant and regarded with suspicion, which he finally disarms to the extent of obtaining a crust of very dry bread; that maidens wearing handkerchiefs instead of hats have without fail travelled from a far country, and in thirsty weather find a glass of raspberry vinegar between them singularly refreshing. All this and more did Mrs. Dutton realise, and her jam and her dripping were incomparable. But even more than her jam and her dripping and her thrice excellent crumbly biscuits with car'way seeds, did we appreciate her welcome. She was always glad to see any of us, even on washing day, when she would point to the many large garments hanging

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on the line, exclaiming proudly, "He do wear as many body clothes in a week as a gentleman, do Dutton!" and we wondered why an extravagance by no means encouraged in us was considered so praiseworthy in him. I mooted the question to Harry, who, with a wisdom beyond his years, said sagely, "Ah, if *we* had a wife like Mrs. Dutton things would be quite different."

One Sunday, for some reason or other, Paul was permitted to accompany Lucy on her rounds with Dutton, and from what Paul said he was much more approachable in these shirt-sleeved, softer moments. They discussed high questions, such as whether there would be any horses in heaven, and Dutton boldly gave it forth as his opinion that "the Lord would n't never go and make such a lot of decent gentlemen miserable as they 'd be if there were n't none; not to say nothing of them as has most to do with 'orses. Look at me, now," said

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Dutton, arranging Lucy's arm more comfortably round his neck; "what would I do a-playin' on a 'arp more than a hour or so at a time? No, Master Paul, I believe as there will be 'orses for them as loves 'orses, only they'll all be thoroughbreds, and none of 'em 'll 'ave any vice."

"Then do you think the horses that are here now will go to heaven, or will they all be new ones, kind of Angel-horses?" asked Paul, who liked to come to definite conclusions upon every subject.

Now, it is not unlikely that Dutton had heard of Whyte-Melville; anyway, he said, "There's many a 'orse I'd rather meet in 'Evin than lots of 'umans I've known, an' I don't see why not; but there, Master Paul, we none of us knows. They're 'ere anyway, an' that's good enough for the likes of you an' me."

"Are you fond of sermons, Dutton?" asked Paul, anxious to discover as much as possible of Dutton's views on things in

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general while he caught him in so affable a mood.

"Well, not to say fond, Master Paul, I 've no objection to 'em in moderation, but you can't be sure of 'em; why, the very finest sermon as I ever 'eard was preached on Brookthorpe Green by a man as were took up next day for stealin' bacon."

At the mention of bacon, Lucy suggested they should go and see the pigs over at the bailiff's little farm; so the three strolled through the orchard to that end.

"Why d' you like Lucy so much better than the rest of us?" asked Paul, the inquisitive.

Dutton stopped and held Lucy out from him like the black kitten in the last chapter of "Alice Through the Looking-Glass"; she thought it was a new kind of game, and kicked her fat legs joyously.

"Why d' you like Dutton, my pretty?" he asked.

Lucy, still suspended in mid-air, stretched

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out her arms to him, exclaiming, with a world of love in her baby voice, "'Cause I do, I loves him."

"There, Master Paul, that's it, 'I luvs my love because my love luvs me.'"

"Ah," said Paul, "I see, *she* had to do it first. *I* see."

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VI

OPINIONS

"The time has come," the walrus said,
"To talk of many things."

LEWIS CARROLL

WE were all sitting on the grass under the hedge, cooling ourselves after an extensive and rather scrambling tea. Miss Goodlake had packed the cups and things, and they lay ready in the perambulator for us to wheel home; she had strolled down to the river bank to "meditate," as she called it. We felt no desire either to accompany her or to play games, so peaceful and so well "tead" were we. For quite two minutes nobody had said anything; then Paul, who was lying face downwards kicking his heels in the air, reverted to what was, with him, a favourite topic. "I wish I could look like Sir William," he

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sighed, "he's so round in front. When I try to make myself round in front I go in hollow behind. Now, Sir William is round in front and straight behind, all solid, it looks *so* pompshus!"

"It's very ugly, *very* ugly!" said Fiametta, the artistic. "It's much better to be straight both sides."

"*Anybody* can be straight both sides!" cried Paul scornfully; "all of us are, but baronets and dukes and people are the shape of Sir William, I tell you!"

Paul spoke with authority, as one well versed in the bearing of the aristocracy.

"I don't believe *young* dukes and baronets are like a pair of bellows, so there! Shakspere's dukes aren't, anyhow. They are quite slim and handsome, else no beautiful ladies would love them," exclaimed Fiametta with some heat.

"Sir John Falstaff was fat," cried Paul, "just like Sir William!"

"He's a *comic* character," replied Fia-

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metta with immense scorn. "Grotesque! that's what he is, like a gargoyle outside a church; there's heaps of them in Florence."

"Well, he was a jolly sight nicer than Hamlet or Macbeth or Othello!" struck in Harry, for once siding with Paul. "It's better to be a bit funny than go grumping round stabbing and smothering people half your time."

"I like tragedy," said Fiametta with the superior finality we found so trying. "Besides," she continued, "you only read Lamb's tales."

"Falstaff's not in the tales," Paul objected.

"Well, you read the other plays in the tales, 'cause Janey told me so. You should read the plays themselves, they're so full of language!"

"What sort of language?" asked Harry in an interested tone.

"*Tremendous* language!" she replied impressively.

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"Swear words?" again queried Harry.

"Well, you see it 's like this; I suppose they 'd be swear words if we used them, but in Shakspere they 're poetry, — poetical licence, you know."

"What 's that?" asked Paul, who was not proud, constantly betraying his ignorance in his thirst for knowledge.

"Oh, don't you know?" cut in Harry, "like 'Licensed to sell beer' outside Mrs. Mumford's shop."

"There 's some licence in my book," said Paul, producing from under his arm the ever-present brown volume of "Norse Tales." "Listen to this:

"'What the Devil do you want?' said one of the grooms to the old woman.

"'Oh! Oh! Hutetu! it is so bitter cold,' said she, and shivered and shook and made wry faces. 'Hutetu! it is so cold, a poor wretch may easily freeze to death': and with that she fell to shivering and shaking again.

"'Oh! for the love of heaven can I get leave

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to stay here a while, and sit inside the stable door?'

"'To the Devil with your leave!' said one —

There!" exclaimed Paul triumphantly.

"Ye-e-es — I suppose it is." Fiametta spoke in a dubious, dissatisfied tone. "I suppose it is, but it's not *tremendous* like Shakspere."

"Let's get Shakspere and look for the licensed bits!" cried Harry, the practical.

"I don't think mother would like it," I objected timidly. "You know when she found Paul reading the Henrys she said we were to be content with Lamb till we were older."

Some grumbling ensued, when Paul, who always liked to come to a clear understanding of one subject before leaving it for another, said meditatively, "I suppose when Sir William says, 'Where's that brute Brenda? Damn the dog, she's after the sheep again!' *that's* poetical licence, — or is it the beer kind?"

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"Sir William isn't a bit poetical!" snapped Fiametta. "Why are you always dragging in your ridiculous Sir William?"

I feared reprisals, for I knew how sensitive Paul was on the subject of his hero, and how ready to avenge upon the offender any fancied slight, but happily Harry came to the rescue with a fresh example of the matter under discussion, remarking, "There's the Combination Service in the prayer book, that's full of cursing!"

"I've not read much of the prayer book — never saw it till I came here," and Fiametta's tone expressed but languid interest.

"Well, it goes on saying, 'cursed is he that' does this and that; an awful lot of things are cursed."

"Why don't we have it instead of that long Litany thing? It would be much more exciting."

"It only comes once a year, I forget when, Christmas or Easter or something."

"I'll look through it," said Fiametta

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patronisingly, "and tell you what I think. But when we act 'Macbeth' — we're going to, you know, the first wet afternoon — we must have the real Shakspere, and I 'll be Lady Macbeth."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the reappearance of Miss Goodlake who came to take Lucy home, bidding us follow with the perambulator in half an hour. We strolled along the river bank discussing "Macbeth," and squabbling over the assignment of parts, and unconsciously enjoying, as children will, the sunshine on the water and the cool breeze. Suddenly we came upon a man lying in the long grass seemingly asleep, for he was very still. Harry was further down in a bend of the river watching a water rat. Paul, Fiametta, and I stood side by side, silent and half afraid.

"Do you fink it's a troll?" whispered Paul, who was ever on the lookout for adventures. The man evidently had quick ears, for he raised himself on his elbow and

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looked at us, saying, "Oh, dear no, only a harmless human." Awake, he was not very alarming. Indeed had he not been so very long, I might have called him a boy. He had red hair growing upright from his forehead like a brush, very blue eyes which at that moment looked amused; his face was burnt a deep red brown, and as his cap lay on the grass beside him, I noted the line which divided the white forehead from the brown face below.

"You will get cold," observed Fiametta, the careful town-bred child, with that perfect ease which always marked her intercourse with strangers. "The grass is not very dry; *we* sat on rugs."

The amusement in the blue eyes deepened, and he laughed, saying, "I like the feel of the good, green grass."

"So do I, and do you like to look through it?"

"Yes, and over it, and down at the river. It's all very good to look at."

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"Are you a poet?" she asked suddenly.

The long young man sat up and stared at her. "What makes you think that?"

"Because I think you must be a poet."

"But why?"

Fiametta shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "Oh, *you* know why. It's rude to ask questions of which you know the answers."

"I didn't mean to be rude," he said humbly, "and I certainly do not know the answer to my question."

"You've not answered mine yet," said Fiametta severely. "*Are* you a poet?"

"I'm not sure," said the young man in rather a melancholy voice; "I would like to be."

"My Daddie is a poet, so I know all about it." They stared at each other for a minute when Paul, who at that time was a living mark of interrogation, said genially, "If you're not a poet, will you tell us what you are?"

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"I 'm a naturalist."

"Beetles?" inquired Paul laconically.

"And butterflies, and plants, and stones, and birds, — lots of jolly things!"

This was evidently a man to be cultivated, so Paul seated himself on a portion of the long legs; but first he would set at rest one chilling doubt.

"You don't give lectures, I hope."

"Never to little boys," said the man with a most reassuring smile.

"But do you give lectures ever? Tell me the real troof!"

The man covered his face with his hands.

"You do! Are you litry *and* scientific?" Paul's voice was very stern.

"No, no," cried the man. "Not both. I assure you not both, only just a teeny weeny bit scientific. You 'll allow me to be that, won't you, and not despise me too awfully? I know lots about trolls, too, I can tell you!"

Fiametta sat down on another piece of

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the long legs. "You'd far better be a poet," she said.

"Come on, you kids!" shouted Harry. "The half-hour's up!"

"I fear we must go," I said. I was sorry, for I liked this man. Paul and Fiametta scrambled to their feet, and the young man rose too; there seemed to be yards of him. "I feel sure we shall meet again," he said, "and then you must explain to me why it is so disgraceful to be —"

"Litry and scientific?" added Paul. "If you had to go to their old lectures *you'd* know."

"Are you coming?" shouted Harry in wrathful tones.

"Good-bye!" called Fiametta as we ran through the long lush grass.

"Good-bye, blue maiden!" called the tall stranger, waving his cap; "I'll let you know when I become a poet."

Fiametta stood still waist-deep in the

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grass to call back to him, "You can't become one, and if you were one you'd know it by this time."

"I'm glad he's not *both*," panted Paul as he ran; "he's too nice."

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VII

BOOK FOLK

Vistas of change and adventure,
Thro' the green land
The grey roads go beckoning and winding.

W. E. Henley

HARRY and I cared but little for books as books. With the exception of the two "Alices," a volume of Grimm, and Paul's adored Norse Tales which had belonged to father, we were possessed of few. "Moral Tales," and the "Parent's Assistant," "Harry and Lucy," "Frank and the Contrast," we cordially detested, and our familiarity with these works was enforced, not willing. We would fain have acknowledged to no more than a bowing acquaintance with their primly virtuous or indecently vicious characters but for mother. She had been brought up and nourished on Miss Edgeworth, and looked upon her as a

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great moral force. Moreover, somebody who was quoted by mother as an authority on all matters ethical and educational, extolled "Harry and Lucy" and its like. This said "somebody" was a puzzle to us, for we were well aware that he was the direct cause of our possessing the fat, green Grimm with delicious little "skibbly" drawings so dear unto our souls. Had he not written for it one of those things no wise child reads, — a Preface? and to this Preface we owed our joy of it. How could one man be possessed of such antipodes of taste?

With Fiametta came fresh wonders, for in the bottom of her box was a gorgeous book bound in blue velvet, the colour of her frocks, with her name worked in silver on the cover, and with silver clasps.

"What but that blessed brief
Of what is gallantest and best
In all the full-shelved Libraries of Romance?
The Book of Rocs, Sandalwood, ivory, turbans, ambergris,
Cream-tarts, and lettered apes, and calendars,

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And ghouls, and genies — O, so huge
They might have overed the tall Minster Tower
Hands down, as school-boys take a post!
In truth the Book of Camaralzaman,
Schemselnihar and Sindbad, Scheherezade
The peerless, Bedreddin, Badroulbadour,
Cairo and Serendib and Candahar,
And Caspian, and the dim terrific bulk
Ice-ribbed, fiend-visited, isled in spells and storms —
Of Kaf! — That centre of miracles
The sole, unparalleled Arabian Nights!"

There is one man alive to-day in England who has not forgotten, who has the genius to describe in golden words what that book may mean to children, and I here take leave to thank him and quote his verse. Paul at once borrowed the book of wonders — Fiametta was always very ready to lend her things — wrapped it in a clean towel filched from mother's room, and sat cross-legged in a corner, absorbed, beatified, till he was hunted forth by nurse, who would exclaim, "You 'll rewing your eyesight, Master Paul, a-poring over that rubbidge. You run out and play!"

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He went meekly, for he knew that rebellion meant the confiscation of this key to a new "magic place," — more magic and more full of wonders than any in which he had yet wandered.

Trolls were terrible enough. It was well known that they swarmed in the bowels of the hill sacred to him of the good yew bow, which rose straight out of the earth but a few short miles from our front door. But what was the terror of trolls compared to that of an invisible genie, who at any moment might be close upon us, and be struck by a carelessly thrown cherry-stone, when he would avenge the indignity by changing the unhappy marksman into a cow.

We all had a great love of the fearsome in literature, and in our plays always went through the most blood-curdling adventures. Fiametta was no whit behind the rest of us in this respect, while her intimate acquaintance with the wonders of the East

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lent a new charm to existence. In very truth we lived our life.

As I look back upon that summer I find it very difficult to separate what really happened from the much more exciting imaginary occurrences. One thing, however, has impressed itself upon my memory, and that is that never before had the works of Miss Edgeworth been so much and so constantly drummed into us. I fancy that mother must have had some idea of the romantic trend our minds were taking, and felt it her duty to keep the balance even by large doses of facts. We studied the tides with "Harry and Lucy," and were required to know the answers to all the trivial questions that the wretched Frank was forever asking; and all this, when the real business of life lay outside among the sentient trees, dim barns, and that thrice blessed coach-house which was not always locked.

We loved mother very dearly, but we

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should have loved her more, and she would have understood us better, but for Miss Edgeworth and her army of incomprehensible proprieties stretching its prim length between us. We fully recognised that with mother absolute justice was always to be found. She was of such crystalline honesty herself, that we were all honest simply because no other line of conduct ever suggested itself. She took the greatest interest in our education, and was, in our neighbourhood, as I have since learnt, considered "advanced" in her views. In fact, in matters of "culture" — a word which we early learnt to regard with suspicion, as referring to something or somebody of an incomprehensible and boresome character — she took the lead. A cathedral city is seldom go-ahead in matters educational, and ours, although in addition to the "Close," and owing to its river it had considerable mercantile interests, was more than usually sleepy. Still, it was possessed

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of a "Literary and Scientific Society," and when people came from a distance to lecture, or read, or recite for the body in question, mother invariably put them up, and more or less arranged the meetings. She thoroughly enjoyed it, feeling that it brought her into touch with the great world of "Culture" she so reverenced. I know she felt that she was giving us unusual advantages in allowing us to spend an occasional desperately uncomfortable five minutes in the society of the somewhat dingy luminaries, who came from time to time to lighten our mental darkness.

We did n't mind them much except when we had to go to the lectures; then, we thirsted for their blood, for the lectures took place at night, and it was a three-mile drive from the "Court" to the "Assembly Rooms." We spent the evening in a vain struggle with an overpowering sleepiness. Father never went but once, and that in the early days of his married life. On that

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occasion somebody gave a lecture on the Holy Land, illustrated by lantern slides. The darkness and the lecturer's monotonous voice had the same effect upon father as the Litany. He slumbered, and as usual "slept out loud." He was sitting in the front row, and the lecturer was his guest. Mother saw the unwisdom of trying to educate father, so he attended lectures no more. Only in one respect did he take any active part in our education; as soon as we could hold the cards he taught us all to play whist. On winter nights, after nursery tea, he used to come and play with us, insisting in his slow, gentle way on absolute silence during the game, explaining our mistakes and praising us when we did well in most delightful fashion between each round.

Paul learned very quickly, but his hands were too small to arrange his cards in a fan after the deal, so he used to retire to a distant part of the room, and spread them

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out upon a chair till they were sorted. When the hand was a good one, he performed a silent war dance, and returned to the card-table, his eyes bigger than ever and preternaturally solemn. Sometimes mother too came to play; "she played a good hand for a woman," father said, but it was upon Paul that his hopes were centred: Paul, who always remembered what suit his partner trumped, and could play his part in a "cross-ruff" with the greatest discretion.

On lecture nights, when mother and the genius who happened to be staying with us had gone off in the carriage, father would fetch us downstairs to play whist in the dining-room. On these delectable occasions we had dessert "between the courses," as Paul put it, and such times stand out in my memory as particularly cosey. The little card-table with its green baize centre and rosewood edge, the cards so full of possibility lying in four enchanting little

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heaps, father in his high-backed oak chair with his "lowest chin" resting on his snowy, many-folded neckcloth, the firelight ruddy and gleaming, reflected in silver and glass and polished wood, — the whole, to me, a picture of pleasantness unmatched in later life. Besides, we ought to have been in bed, especially Paul, and that put the finishing touch to the delight of such experiences. What wonder, then, that we railed at fate when we had to attend a lecture?

Nowadays there are unhappy children who are "studied" all day long; whose plays are arranged for them always with a view to "development"; who may not even make mud-pies in decent seclusion, but must perforce and in gangs "shape something" out of grey india rubber, and sit at a table to do it. What can they know, poor things, of the joys and terrors to be found in a dwarf-infested shrubbery, just at sunset, on a chill October day?

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Harry, Paul, and I were resting on one such afternoon, squeezed in between two somewhat scratchy fir-trees. We had nearly concluded a most exciting search for a dwarf of singularly evil disposition, who held in captivity a fair princess of our acquaintance. Our quest was hitherto unsuccessful, owing to the fact that Paul refused to be discovered as the dwarf. We told him plainly what we thought of his conduct, concluding our remarks with a threat to the effect that, as it was nearly tea-time and rapidly growing dark, we would run away and leave him — we could both run much faster than he could — if he did not immediately "finish the game."

Paul made no answer, but suddenly began to recite in a fearsome whisper the following menacing incantation:

"'For whether he were husbandman, or shepherd, or a labourer in the field, he was overtaken, and endured that necessity, which could not

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be avoided: for they were all bound with one chain of darkness. Whether it were a whistling wind, or a melodious noise of birds among the spreading branches, or a pleasing fall of water running violently, or a terrible sound of stones cast down, or a running that could not be seen of skipping beasts, or a roaring voice of most savage wild beasts, or a rebounding echo from the hollow mountains: these things made them to swoon for fear.'"

It was growing darker and darker, and the horror of that "running that could not be seen of skipping beasts" was upon me. They were there, I was sure of it, and I also was ready "to swoon for fear." When Paul ceased his whispered description of the horrors in store for us, he continued to stare into the gathering darkness with big awe-struck eyes. Another moment and I should have had a fit or something from sheer terror, but Harry suddenly found his voice, and exclaimed, "Shut up, you sidey little ass, or I'll give you something to skip for! Come on, Janey."

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All the same we did not leave Paul in that shrubbery.

It was not till years afterwards that I found where he had got his weird quotation. How many of my readers can say at a glance whence it comes?

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VIII

SERGEANT

Two things greater than all things are,
The first is Love, and the second, War.
And since we know not how war may prove,
Heart of my heart, let us talk of Love!

RUDYARD KIPLING

WHAT Sir William was to Paul, what the Vicar's eldest son at Rugby was to Harry, what Sir Launcelot was to Fiametta, all this and more was Sergeant unto me. I suppose he had another name, but for us he was just "Sergeant," the title quintessentialising "all that was gallantest and best," strongest and handsomest, gayest and kindest, of the strong, gay, kindly soldierhood of all time. It is true that when we were privileged to see most of Sergeant, he had left the army for some years and wore the peaceful habit of the

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gymnast; but no one who had ever seen him in all the glory of his yeomanry uniform clanking on creaking saddle down a country lane, for us the central figure of the long, dusty line of well-horsed uncomfortable-looking men, but felt that he was different to the others. The stamp of the Blankley Lancers was upon him; he wore his 'coutrements and sat his horse with a grace and ease quite unattainable, by what we in our superior knowledge called the "summer soldiers."

Sergeant taught gymnastics at every school in the county, and riding, swimming, boxing, and fencing, to such fortunate persons as were allowed to learn. Mother, with a natural wisdom that neither Edgeworthian dogma nor strivings after "the higher intellectual life" could entirely overcast, insisted that every child who lived by a river should be taught to swim, and to swim in the river. Moreover, she saw no reason why a strong, healthy girl should

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not be taught to exercise her muscles as well as her brothers, the result being that I did "gym" with Harry and the vicarage boys in a disused barn fitted up for the purpose. I think that in our neighbourhood people must have been peculiarly behind the times, for mother could persuade no other mothers to send their little girls to join our class. Sergeant's class in the town was entirely composed of boys, so I could n't have gone to that. He was consulted as to the fitting up of the barn as a "gym," and we had parallel bars, a horse, a rope, a horizontal bar, and the rings. I had a proper gymnasium dress, and did all the exercises with the boys. Sergeant took an especial interest in me, for I was the very first girl he had taught. Big for my age, and strong, the exercises came easily to me; besides, he was the most careful and encouraging of teachers. Paul was not quick, he was small and delicate and nervous, but he had absolute faith in Sergeant, and what

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Sergeant told him to do he tried with all his little might to accomplish.

"He 's the most intelligent of them all," Sergeant said to mother; "he understands in a minute what you want him to do, and he looks at me that pitiful with his big eyes, that I can hardly bear to make him do the things he 's afraid of, but he 's getting on, and it 's more credit to him, for he 's got a lot of nervousness to get over. Miss Jane, now! she don't care how she fling herself about."

The secret of Sergeant's success as a teacher was that he never let anybody get frightened, and he was immensely careful that young muscles should never be overstrained. Mother had absolute faith in him, and he taught us just what he liked. When it was decided that Harry was to learn fencing, a wild hope sprang up in my heart that I might be allowed to learn too. I knew that it was quite an unheard-of thing, but then, none of the little girls of my acquaint-

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ance did the "circle under the bar," or "right leg acting," or any of the glorious feats which I performed so greatly to my own and to Sergeant's satisfaction.

I remember it all so well; I was sitting on the horizontal bar and Sergeant was standing below me; I stooped down and put my arms round his neck; I noticed that his hair was turning grey just round his ears, and his woollen "sweater" felt rough to my bare arms. "Sergeant dear!" I whispered, "do ask mother to let me learn fencing. Harry won't have anybody to practise with if I don't."

He lifted me off the bar and put me on the ground. "I don't see why you should n't," he said somewhat dubiously, "but you must n't get practisin' when I 'm not there, you 'll hurt yourselves."

"Will you ask mother, Sergeant?"

"Tell you what, Miss Janey, you ask your pa, and see what *he* says!"

I asked father, and he backed me up.

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Mother spoke to Sergeant on the subject, and *he* backed me up, waxing eloquent as to the benefit to one's "carriage" to be derived from a skilful use of the foils, and the result was that I learned to fence. Then, of course, I longed to learn to box, but upon this question Sergeant was firm in his objections, and was not to be cajoled even though I begged and prayed as prettily as the lassie in Paul's Norse Tales.

"No, Miss, it would be an 'orrid spectacle to see a woman boxing."

"But I'm not a woman, Sergeant, and I know I could do it very well."

"You'll be a woman sooner than you think for, Miss!"

"Suppose a burglar came, it would be a good thing to be able to knock him down."

"You'll always have plenty of men folk about you to do that; never you fear as to that, Miss Janey!"

Father was just as firm about it as Ser-

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geant. I thought it very narrow of them both.

Harry, however, did not share their scruples, and as there were several pairs of gloves hanging in the gymnasium, and as I was allowed to be present at the lessons, he and I practised frequently in secret, and hit each other about, pretty hard. I will say for Harry that he was very careful of my face, and hitherto no accident had occurred to betray the forbidden sport.

One day, for some reason, none of the other boys turned up, and when it was time to put on the gloves Harry forgot Sergeant's prejudices, and said easily, "As there 's no one else, I may as well box with Janey, and then you can see if I do that new guard properly better than if I was boxing with you, you 're so awfully tall."

Sergeant turned and looked me up and down with a humorous twinkle in his eyes. "So you could n't keep your hands out of 'em after all, Miss Janey?"

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"She really boxes very well," said Harry; "but I do wish you'd show her how to guard her face better. I'm always afraid that some day I may forget and knock her teeth down her throat."

The smile died out of Sergeant's eyes. "You'd best let it alone," he said, shaking his head, "and you, Master Harry, have no business to encourage her; it's dangerous. It don't matter so much if a boy breaks a front tooth, though it's a pity, is that" — Sergeant himself had most beautiful teeth — "but for a girl! No, Miss Janey, if you persist I'll have to speak to your ma, for I don't hold with it. What do you want to do it for? You can swim, you can ride, you can do most of the exercises, and you're learnin' to fence, — the only young lady in the county as is learnin' to fence, I bet any money. You let the gloves alone."

He didn't tell of me that day, however, and I continued to practise with Harry till

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one unlucky day he forgot, and gave me a tremendous blow plump on my nose. Oh! how it bled! There was no concealing the occurrence, and Harry, horrified and frightened, ran and fetched mother.

That was the end of my boxing, and the punishment was heavy, for I was not allowed to watch the boys any more.

I know that Sergeant was sorry for me next time he came; he pretended that he did n't observe my swollen nose, and when, after the fencing lesson, Miss Goodlake came to take me away that I might not watch the "brutal sport" which had so demoralised me, he opened the door for us and whispered, "Cheer up, Miss, it 's all for the best," I worshipped him. But I felt disgraced beyond hope of rehabilitation. I had not cried about my nose, though it was pretty sore; I was going to cry now, however, and I broke away from Miss Goodlake's detaining hand, and, regardless of her expostulations and the fact that I had

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nothing on but my "gym" dress and a golf cape of mother's, I ran as fast as my legs would carry me to the little copse behind the house, through which Sergeant always passed when he walked into the town.

It began to rain, but what cared I? Publicly disgraced,—"unsexed" Miss Goodlake had called me; I had n't a notion what it meant, but was sure it was something very horrid, — with a swollen nose and an unfortunate brother whom my own lack of skill had got into trouble, I felt that nothing mattered, only — I wanted to see Sergeant.

Presently there was the sound of quick, firm footsteps, and he came swiftly down the narrow path towards me, his coat collar turned up to his ears because of the rain.

"Whatever are you doing here, Miss Janey?" he asked in astonishment, as I crept out into his path.

"I wanted to ask you not to be angry

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with Harry, it was n't his fault and they 're all so cross with him."

"I 'm not the least angry with Master Harry, but I 'm sorry about you — I knew something would happen."

"But, Sergeant, what does a little knock matter? Why may n't I box?"

"Because you 're a maid, my dear," and he laid a big, kind hand on my shoulder; "it 's against nature."

"But why must boys learn to fight if it 's wrong for me? I feel just like a boy, and can do most things just like them."

"Dear me! what a questionsome young lady it is," said Sergeant, regarding me with kind, amused brown eyes. "You see it 's like this: a man wot can't hold his own in a fight, he's handicapped, that's what he is. Besides," and here Sergeant beamed at the acuteness of his own reasoning, "if we could n't fight we could n't take care of the likes of you, and where'd you be then?"

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I felt that he was begging the question, and suggested that I was allowed to do "all the other things," though I was a girl.

"And quite right, too, Miss, you 'll be none the worse woman because you can vault a gate at a run."

What would Dr. Arabella Keneally have said to Sergeant? and this before the time of the ubiquitous bicycle.

"You see it 's like this, Miss Janey: boys and girls they wants to play just the same — but by and by there comes a time when they 're different and goes different ways, and likes different things. It can't be altered, you take my word for it."

"Do *you* think I 'm disgraceful?" I asked. Miss Goodlake's lecture rankled.

"Bless yer heart, no!" he exclaimed with refreshing vigour; "I 'd have given a good deal to see that round. But I am sorry about your poor little nose; such noses was never meant to be pounded."

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This was balm, indeed, to my wounded feelings; my family had pointed out with their usual candour that I "could n't afford to have my nose made any flatter than it was already." "You won't tell anybody!" I pleaded. I was beginning to see the enormity of my offence.

"I 'll never tell a soul!" vowed Sergeant; and I happen to know for certain that he never did. I wonder how many people there are that would keep a like promise?

Then we shook hands, Sergeant imploring me to go in out of the wet at once. I watched his tall figure as he swung himself over the gate leading from the copse into the field where the footpath was free to all, and admiring his jaunty, light-footed soldier's walk, vowed that there was nobody like him in the whole wide world. Then I went back to the house, where I was promptly captured and sent to bed for insubordination to Miss Goodlake.

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I had seen Sergeant, though, and he didn't think so very badly of me; for Miss Goodlake's opinion I did not care one jot.

All this happened the year before Fiametta came to stay, and when she came our "gym" lessons had ceased for the summer, but Sergeant came to swim with Harry and me twice a week in a bend of the river where it was shallow. She came to watch us disport ourselves, and of course absorbed all the conversation; she charmed Sergeant by her tales of men and cities, and confided to me that but for the fact that he had a wife already, she thought she would have married him herself. I was so thankful he had a wife already.

"A detachment of my old regiment is on the march," said Sergeant one day. "They're billeted in the town to-night."

"Shall *we* have any of them? Oh, *do* let us have some of them!" we screamed in chorus.

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"Bless your 'earts, no!" laughed Sergeant. "It's the trades-people wot gets 'em."

"But could n't we have some? We *should* like it so, and there's lots of room in our house."

Sergeant's eyes twinkled as he murmured something concerning "too many maids about."

"But they'd like it!" exclaimed Paul. "Only the other day Dorcas was saying how dull it is."

"Your ma would n't like it, though!" and Sergeant laughed again; "besides, 't is n't the gentry that has to billet 'em."

"The dears!" cried Fiametta ecstatically. "O Sergeant! we *must* see them!"

"Well, that's just what I'm comin' at. Funnily enough they'll drill and start to-morrow at the South Gate, almost in front of our house. Now you go and ask your mamma if you may all come and sit in my windows to see them start."

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"Lucy, too?" asked Paul, who never liked any of the family to be left out.

"Certainly, most particular, Miss Lucy; my missus would love her."

Three minutes later a breathless deputation burst in upon mother, who was doing accounts in the morning-room: "Mother! Mother! the Blankley Lancers are coming!" we screamed in chorus. Mother raised her head, keeping her finger at the exact line she had reached in the column of figures she was adding up, and said calmly, "That is no reason, my dears, so far as I can see, why you should suppose me to be suddenly smitten with deafness. I am exceedingly busy just now, please run away!"

Taking up her pencil again, in one second she was emersed in her accounts. She had a power I have never seen equalled, of absolutely absorbing herself in whatever she happened to be doing. We stared at one another aghast. Sergeant was waiting,

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and the question was a momentous one. Paul was pushed forward as being the most diplomatic of the party; he laid a small, brown hand on her arm. "Mother," he whispered in his smallest voice, "Sergeant says if you 'll let us, he 'll have us in his windows to see the soldiers to-morrow, all us children, Lucy, too! It will be quite early, and he will fetch us in his gig and bring us home, and it won't be no trouble —"

Mother, her finger still on the book, looked up to meet Paul's big, serious eyes, then looked round at the rest of the excited quartette surrounding her. "It is exceedingly kind of Sergeant," she said, "but what of Mrs. Sergeant, how will she like such an invasion?"

"She 'd love it!" cried Fiametta, "he says so."

"It will be so beautiful!" whispered Paul, rubbing his cheek against mother's shoulder.

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Paul was pushed forward as being the most diplomatic of the party.

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"My compliments to Sergeant, and say that I am very much obliged to him — " we waited in breathless anxiety, for mother made a little pause — "and I shall be most pleased to let you go."

We fled to carry him this glorious news, all but Paul, who waited to kiss and thank mother. He always remembered to do that sort of thing.

When Sergeant had departed, and Paul had rejoined us, he said, in a dissatisfied voice, "Do you know what mother says about Sergeant? She says that he is an 'excellent man.' Now, I thought it was only clergymans who was called those sort of names."

"Anybody can be excellent," dogmatised Harry, "and after all, Sergeant's name is just like a parson's."

It was inconceivable, but so it was; Sergeant's name was Barlow, — in our eyes the one flaw in an otherwise perfect personality. Of course it did n't matter much, for

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we never called him by his name, still, we would have preferred something else. "Sandford and Merton" was lumped together in our minds with "Frank" and "The Purple Jar." Still, if his name *was* Barlow he came from Berkeley in our own county, and that was something to be proud of.

None of us had ever seen Mrs. Barlow, and many were the surmises as to what she would be like. We knew that they had no children because we had once asked Sergeant, and he had looked so sad that we never mentioned the subject again.

Our excitement was increased that evening by the fact that one of the officers commanding the company of Lancers billeted in the town actually came to dinner, and Fiametta, Harry, and I went down to dessert. He was a dreadful disappointment, as he wore quite ordinary clothes, the sort of clothes the lecture people wore, and had n't so much as a dagger about him.

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There were several other guests, and we, of course, did not speak at all. Fiametta did, though, and from her place at father's elbow addressed the guest of the evening: "You won't wear those clothes to-morrow, I hope," she remarked to her opposite neighbour in what Harry called her "curate-like voice."

The young man looked across at her and laughed. He looked nice when he laughed, his teeth were so white and his face so brown. "Why?" he asked.

"Because, how can we tell you're a Lancer in that coat? You're just like everybody else."

"I shall be more like everybody else to-morrow, like all the rest of the regiment, I mean."

"You'll wear your pretty clothes to-morrow?"

"Ah, you should see my other clothes!" he cried, quoting Prince Bulbo.

"We *shall* see them; we're going to sit

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in Sergeant's windows to see you all pass by. Will you wave to us?"

"I 'll salute you; mind you look out for me!"

"Oh, we 'll all scream at you," said Fiametta reassuringly; "you can't miss us."

"Please don't scream, I might fall off my horse."

"Well, we 'll wave our handkerchiefs — if we have n't lost them. But you 'll be sure to see us if you look out."

"I have n't the least doubt of it," he said, and soon after that we were sent to bed. Mother was never quite sure what to do with Fiametta when she absorbed the conversation, and I fear the rest of us thoroughly enjoyed her dilemma.

When we got upstairs we discovered that the rain was coming down in torrents; suppose it should rain in the morning, would Sergeant come for us or not?

"Let 's all pray hard for a fine day!" suggested the ever-ready Fiametta. "God

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will have plenty of time to change it before to-morrow."

Fiametta always seemed on more familiar terms with the authorities than the rest of us.

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IX

PAGEANT

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear at least!
There, the whole day long one's life is a perfect feast.
ROBERT BROWNING

"JANEY, wake up! It's a lovely day! I told you so!" and Fiametta shook me as she jumped excitedly up and down on her little white feet.

I suppose we got up and dressed and had breakfast as usual, but I remember nothing till we found ourselves jogging gaily through familiar, fresh-washed, hay-scented lanes, with shining, morning faces and light hearts, — "six precious souls and all agog," somewhat tightly packed into Sergeant's roomy gig.

Down the hill and over the bridge by the docks, up the hill again between tall ware-

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houses, whence issued strange rumblings and whirrings and showers of sun-gilded chaff, thence into the straight street called the South Gate, where no two houses were of the same size or shape; graceful, timbered houses with overhanging gables cheek by jowl with grave grey stone, square windowed and blue slated. White-harled, high-shouldered cottages elbowed the Gothic Grammar School and Saint Mary's Church. In our city, churches crop up in the middle of the street, separated in no way save by their grace of form from the other buildings. "As sure as God's in Garchester," ran the old proverb, referring to the number of churches to be found there. In old times they liked their praying places handy for everyday use; the patient spires still point heavenwards, but too often the church is shut except for service. Only the great Cathedral, standing alone, serenely beautiful in an oasis of trim gardens and green lawns, keeps ever open-house from early

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morn to curfew — then still rung each evening by Saint Michael's bells — for all who would rest and ruminate in the great cool Norman-pillared nave.

"If your house was turned upside down and my legs were long enough I could go upstairs outside," said Paul, as we pulled up before Sergeant's door, where his wife was waiting to bid us welcome; and when I saw her, child as I was, I realised that she was one of the chief reasons why Sergeant was so nice.

Paul regarded her with admiring eyes. "You are just like what I 'magined you would be, just every bit as nice," he remarked confidentially, as, hand-in-hand with her (she carried Lucy on her other arm), they climbed the curly staircase, with steps so wide at the one side and tapering off to the acutest angle at the other.

I agreed with Paul. She, too, was upright and tall and trim, with fresh com-

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plexion and big, kind blue eyes; but the abundant hair parted smoothly over the peaceful forehead was already quite grey, and round the kind eyes were lines and shadows. There was sorrow in the face, but no discontent, no revolt. Years afterwards as I stood before the "Madonna of the Grand Duke" in the Pitti Gallery, I found myself staring straight through the picture into a room, low-ceilinged with cross-beams, whose two windows looking onto the busy street of a market-town, were crowded with eager children, and I knew that I had found the prototype of Sergeant's wife. Here was the same pure colouring and big gentleness, the same calmness and patient sorrow and tender kindliness.

"You 'll see they don't none of them fall out," said Sergeant, putting his head round the corner of the door; "I 'm going out into the street to see an old pal," and then the fun began.

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A Romance of the Nursery

What is there in the sound of a trumpet that is so rousing? As the plangent notes rang out through the sunny, quiet street, the whole population woke up, and little knots of people collected on the pavement; then came a clatter of hoofs, a delicious jingle of accoutrements, and the street was alive with sound and colour, for the Lancers had come. The old houses seemed to shake themselves and open their eyes, as up and down throughout the whole frontage there rattled a volley of thrown-up windows.

Sergeant's were the very nicest windows. One could kneel on the floor, put one's elbows on the sill, and lean right over with never a fear of falling. Sergeant's wife with Lucy on her knee, Harry, and Paul, were at one window, Fiametta and I had the other all to ourselves. From time to time scraps of conversation were blown over to me by the gay little wind that fluttered the lance-pennons, and even in

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the midst of my excitement I found time to feel a little surprised that Harry was so talkative, and that his hostess seemed to be watching him far more intently than the pageant in the street. When our friend of last night, resplendent now in his "other clothes," clattered past the window to take up his stand further down the street, Fiametta gave a little shriek of delighted recognition, and he looked up and saluted; at that moment we had nothing left to wish for.

Sergeant moved in and out among the men, shortening a stirrup leather here, tightening a girth there; they all seemed to know him, and to be glad to see him again, and presently, when we saw him having quite a long chat with "our officer," we nearly jumped out of the window in our excitement.

The trumpet rang out again, and in one minute the long double line of men and horses stood as if turned to stone.

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Somebody roared out an order, and the beautiful wise horses wheeled round. Two by two, side by side, with jingling bits and waving pennons, the Blankley Lancers went leisurely down the street.

"Hurrah!" cried Paul in his clear child-voice, as he waved his straw hat.

"Hurrah!" echoed the Scotch tobacconist over the way, waving a gay smoking-cap as he stood in his shirt-sleeves at his shop door. "Hurrah!" yelled the boys in the doorway of the Grammar School. The whole street took up the shout and cheered till the last couple of Lancers had turned the corner by Saint Michael's Church, and it settled to rest again with its usual sleepy calm.

There was an inviting clink of plates in the room behind us, and we drew in our heads to find that Sergeant's wife had prepared a veritable feast for us, to which we did the amplest justice, for our breakfast, owing to the tremendous

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events to come, had been but a sketchy meal.

When Sergeant brought round the gig once more, and we had all descended the curly staircase and passed through the cool dark passage leading to the street, when we had all bidden farewell to our kind hostess and stood once more in the hot, sunny street, she called Harry back and closed the door. He came out again very red, and hardly spoke at all during the drive home.

That evening when he and I were sitting alone in the harness room, — the men had gone to tea, — I ventured to ask him why Sergeant's wife had called him back. "I would n't tell anybody but you, Janey," he said slowly, "she wanted to kiss me, and was afraid I would mind, because I 'm such a big chap and going to school next term, and that — her boy would have been just my age if he had lived, and she thinks me a bit like him." I did not look at Harry,

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his voice was so gruff. "I think I'll go and see her often," he continued. "I like her."

That was the beginning of Harry's friendship with Sergeant's wife. Somebody must have explained things to mother, for she seemed to understand perfectly. Curiously enough, here was somebody who did not hunger after Paul, nor Lucy with her cuddly ways; it was Harry, the typical "boy" — shy, awkward, and somewhat taciturn, for whom she conceived an enthusiastic admiration; and Harry understood her, and enjoyed the spoiling she always gave him, showing to her a side of his character hitherto quite unimagined by his family. He kissed her frankly whenever they met, even in the street, and when he went to public school she was always the first person to be visited on his return for the holidays, sometimes on his way from the station.

We all got to know Sergeant's wife, we

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all loved her and she assuredly loved us, but Harry was a long way first in the field; and as he had never before been singled out for anybody's special favour, he was perhaps unusually appreciative of hers.

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X

CONTEMPT OF COURT

It 's a different thing that I demand,
Tho' humble as can be —
A statement fair in my Maker's hand
To a gentleman like me.

R. L. S.

IT was hard to return to the schoolroom and to Miss Goodlake after such an epoch-making morning; the fact that it was barely eleven o'clock when we got home only seemed to make matters worse. Harry snatched up his bag of books and raced across to the vicarage, and the rest of us sat down to what was the invariable prelude to morning lessons, — the Church Catechism. For Fiametta it had the charm of novelty, as she had never learned a word of it till she came to us, and looked upon the necessity with a sort of amused toleration as one of Miss Goodlake's foibles, to

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be indulged accordingly, for she and Fiametta were on the best of terms.

That morning the devil entered into Paul, for when he was repeating the Commandments he made the following startling statement, "Thou shalt do nine murders."

"Paul!" exclaimed Miss Goodlake, hardly believing her own ears, "repeat the Sixth Commandment again."

"Thou shalt do nine murders," reiterated Paul loudly and distinctly, with a stony countenance from which every trace of intelligence was banished.

Fiametta giggled.

"Go to your room, Paul!" said Miss Goodlake sternly, "and when you have reflected upon your levity and hardness of heart, come back and say the Sixth Commandment properly."

Paul went, grinning delightedly at me through a chink in the door before he shut it.

Twenty minutes passed, but Paul did

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not return. Miss Goodlake fidgeted and looked anxious; finally, giving each of us a page of history to prepare for dictation, she departed to look for Paul.

She found him in his room right enough, but seated on the floor reading Fiametta's "Arabian Nights," which was scarcely what she intended. Long time did she wrestle in argument with Paul; she tried persuasion, she tried threats, she lectured, she preached, but nothing would induce him either to say that he was sorry or to reduce in any degree the number of his murders. Then nurse was sent for, the culprit was undressed and put to bed, the "Arabian Nights" taken away, and the blinds pulled down.

Lunch time came and Paul was still unrepentant. Mother was told of his iniquity, and although she entirely approved of the measures Miss Goodlake had taken for his correction, she did not look quite as much shocked as might have been expected. A

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thick slice of dry bread and a glass of milk were sent in to Paul for dinner, and we were all forbidden to go near him. Harry was particularly grumpy and hovered about the passage outside the prisoner's room, but did not dare go to him to lighten his captivity. A voice proclaiming at intervals, "She 's a beast, she 's a brute!" betrayed his unrepentant condition, but between whiles there was a sound of sobbing which was unendurable. I took my courage in both hands and went to ask mother if I might go and talk to him, and try to bring him to a proper frame of mind. "He generally listens to me," I concluded. Mother looked me over as though she were considering my qualifications. "You may go," she said, "but you are not to sympathise with him. He must apologise to Miss Goodlake before he is allowed to get up."

I opened the door softly and shut it behind me. In the semi-darkness I could

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only see a little huddled-up bundle on the bed, while a melancholy small voice repeated in a sort of sing-song: "Nobody loves me, no, not one. Mother does n't love me, father does n't love me, Fee does n't love me, Harry does n't love me, Miss Goodlake — she 's a beast, she 's a brute! I don't love *her!*"

"Paul!" I said softly, "I love you."

He sat up in bed and regarded me with some surprise. "What time is it, Janey?" he asked in a matter-of-fact voice.

"It 's nearly half-past two, and I shall need to go to lessons directly. Oh, do say your Commandment right and that you 're sorry, and get up; it 's hateful to have you mewed up here."

"I 'm not sorry," said Paul obstinately.

"But, Paul, think! It 's very wicked to make fun of the Commandments, they are God's word."

"I need n't obey God if I don't want to; I can go to Hell if I prefer it."

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He put his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, staring at me with his open eyes.

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This rather took my breath away, but Paul never was even naughty like anybody else, and it was no use to be horrified, — that was what he was playing up for. I knew Paul.

"You would n't like it when you got there," I said cheerfully, "I 'm sure it 's a horrid place."

He put his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, staring at me with big, interested eyes, the tears still wet on his cheeks. "How do you know?" he asked.

"It says so in 'Line upon Line.'"

"Janey, I don't believe much of 'Line upon Line.' It 's not real-sounding like the Bible."

By "real-sounding" he meant what reviewers are pleased to call "convincing." "The love of lovely words" was very strong in Paul, and from his babyhood he had cared greatly how a story was told, his taste, as I have since discovered, being invariably and entirely right.

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"What made you say that about the murders?" I asked, feeling that if we began to discuss the relative literary merits of "Line upon Line" and the Bible, we should never get any "forrader."

"Because it annoyed me, and I wanted to watch Miss Goodlake's face, and to see what would happen."

"Well, you've seen, and it is n't very nice; say your Commandment and get up!"

"I'll say the old Commandment, but I won't say I'm sorry for saying it wrong, 'cause I 'm not. It was n't no mistake."

"Well, say you are sorry to have vexed Miss Goodlake and mother."

"I don't see why I should say it, — I've been punished, I've paid for what I've done. I was naughty, and they've punished me. There's an end of it. Why should I say I was sorry?"

"Because there won't be an end of it till you do."

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This seemed to strike Paul as sound argument. He knitted his brows and pondered for a time, then said slowly, "It would be more sense if those Commandments, instead of telling little children 'thou shalt not' do all sorts of funny crimes they never want to do, said 'Thou shalt tell no lies even to get out of stopping in bed.' I'm going to tell a lie now 'cause I'm tired of being here. I'm not sorry, not a bit. But Harry promised to bowl to me after tea, so I must get up somehow, — but it's a nawful lie!" and Paul sighed, shaking his head over the inevitability of this perjury.

"Are you never sorry when you are naughty?" I asked mournfully; such hardness of heart seemed incomprehensible in one so young.

"Never," said Paul with evident conviction. "At least never at the time. Perhaps I am a year after — a little— if I remember. I dare say when I am growed up

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I shall be awfully sorry, but it comes very slow with me."

Time was getting on. "What shall I say?" I asked. "Shall I tell them you are sorry?"

"There 's no use two of us tellin' lies," he answered magnanimously; "you ask Miss Goodlake to come here, and I 'll do it all myself."

"Oh, Paul, Paul, do try and *feel* sorry!"

"Tell you what," he exclaimed, jumping up and down with a radiant face, "I 'll p'etend I 'm a prodigal. Then I 'll feel ever so sorry. Hurry up and fetch Miss Goodlake!"

I hurried up.

"Dear little boy," said Miss Goodlake to mother that evening; "one forgives him all his naughtiness, he 's so sweet about it afterwards."

Mother said nothing, and from the expression of her face it was borne upon my mind that she understood Paul.

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That youth wore a chastened yet radiant aspect for the rest of the day. At bedtime he remarked complacently to Harry, "I've been such a nice prodigal, have n't I?"

"*I* don't call you a prodigal," answered Harry with that bluntness characteristic of his remarks; "you're a humbug, that's what you are."

"Well, it all means the same," retorted Paul with unconscious cynicism, as he departed to bed.

"I do believe we mind his punishments more than he does," said Harry.

In after life I have frequently reflected upon the seeming prerogative of Genius to make other people suffer for its sins.

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XI

THE RED GIANT

I have just to shut my eyes
To go sailing through the skies —
To go sailing far away
To the pleasant Land of Play.

R. L. S.

THE Vicar had flogged Harry. That he had also flogged his own son did not seem to make it any better. Harry was sore mentally and physically; although with that inborn sense of justice so often manifested in boys, and apparently left out in girls, he acknowledged that he deserved it. We by no means agreed with him. Paul's favourite phrase, "I don't see why," was reiterated till it seemed to form a sort of Greek chorus to the rest of our remarks. "How," we indignantly demanded, "is one to become a good shot with a catapult if one never practises at a mark?" and if one is

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not a good shot with a catapult, all the more interesting, the higher walks in life, such as brigand or highwayman, are closed to one. In this instance a flowerpot in dangerous proximity to the greenhouse had been the mark, and the greenhouse had suffered, hence these tears!

We reflected upon these things sitting gloomily in two solemn rows on the shafts of a hay-cart, in the yard sacred to cow-sheds. And our sadness was in no way dispersed when Miss Goodlake found us, bearing the information that mother was going to take Paul, Fiametta, and me to a lecture that afternoon. Fiametta, who had never been to a lecture in her life, aggravated our sense of injury by seeming pleased at the intelligence. But Paul and I (Harry, being in disgrace, escaped), who had plumbed the hollowness of lectures to their dreary depths, went heavily. We could not discover that any good purpose was served by our having to be arrayed in

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Sunday seemliness on Wednesday afternoon, — a fine Wednesday afternoon, which might have been spent in the orchard, or by the river, was thus wrested from us by the authorities, and sacrificed to the darksome stuffiness of a lecture-theatre in the School of Art. Truly we had fallen on an evil day! Lectures usually came in winter, and it did not in the least cheer us to be told that the lecturer was to return in the carriage with us to dine and sleep, that he was a most remarkable young man, and that Garchester might think itself very honoured in getting him to lecture at all: that father and mother had met him at a dinner-party at the Palace (only a bishop's palace, not a king's, and we did n't think much of it, it was n't half so pretty as the Deanery which was joined right on to the Cathedral and looked like a bit of it), and that mother — why should she do these things? — had persuaded him to give this lecture in the off season. All this was ex-

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plained to us on the way to the lecture, and when we got there we found to our further aggravation that seats had been reserved for us in the front and lowest row, right in among all the Cathedral dignitaries.

Our position was disappointing, because, as the seats in the lecture-theatre rose in tiers to the ceiling, we could, when seated fairly high — and especially if the room was dark as in the case of a lecture illustrated by lantern slides — while away a tedious hour by blowing softly and steadily upon that member of the audience seated just below us. The nape of the neck was usually the spot selected, and it filled us with unholy glee when the victim shivered, looked round angrily for a possible open window, and perhaps arranged some extra wrap in protection of the draught-beleaguered head. But no such solace was possible to us to-day. There did not seem any prospect of so much as an explosion, — a contingency we always looked forward to from that day

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when, an experiment going wrong, a retort burst, making a glorious mess and a smell so terrific that the audience was fain to take flight ten minutes too soon. To-day, however, no apparatus adorned the table, nought but a dejected-looking water-bottle and glass in forlorn solitude, with a dismal expanse of blackboard as background.

At last the lecturer appeared, and our indignation can better be imagined than described, when we discovered him to be the man, our man, of the red hair and kind blue eyes, who lay in the grass and seemed so sensible and understanding. In the excitement of this discovery, Paul stood right up in his place, and in a voice quite audible above the polite plaudits greeting the lecturer's entrance, exclaimed in tones of withering scorn, "Oh, you *story!*"

He was evidently conscious of his guilt, for he blushed up to the roots of his red hair, and regardless of customary ordinance, came round the big oblong table to us, and

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whispered, "I could n't help it, wait till I explain;" then to mother reproachfully, "Why did you bring them? I begged you not to." Then he went back behind the table again, and said, "Ladies and Gentlemen," and the lecture on "Eminent Zoölogists" began.

I don't remember much about it except that it seemed soon over, that there were lots of stories, and that what Paul afterwards called "those beetle-men" seemed good sort of people on the whole, and almost as much harassed as we were ourselves by uncomprehending outsiders. The bishop proposed a vote of thanks to the lecturer in his gentle, weak old voice, whereupon Paul murmured something to the effect that a bishop must not be a brawler, apparently in explanation of the fact that what the bishop said could certainly not have been heard three rows back. Paul had an aggravating habit of learning whole chapters of the Bible at once, and he insisted

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on reading it with the same voracity that he brought to every other book. It is a curious thing that so many otherwise intelligent and cultivated people seem to have inherited or absorbed the idea that the Bible is the one published book which it is well to read in snippets — a verse or two at a time, regardless of context or symmetry, or even meaning. There is, I believe, a large number of people who belong to various "unions" and "societies," which mark off for the daily reading of their members three or four texts, and having read these texts conscientiously, the said members close their Bibles thoroughly convinced that by this means they are doing all that religion requires of them in the study of the Scriptures. Is it not possible that this disjointed way of reading what is, after all, the finest example of style, construction, and reasoned narrative in our language, may have something to do with the narrowness, unreason, and complete

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contradiction by conduct, of expressed belief that one so often meets with in what are, apparently, sincerely religious people?

Harry and I each read one verse of the Bible daily out of a birthday book, and were quite satisfied therewith, but Paul would have none of such niggardly methods, reading his Bible as greedily as he read Norse Tales; the result being that he knew all his favourite passages by heart, and his vocabulary was frequently embellished by adjectives more forcible than usual or polite.

"Well, you weren't so long as some of them," he remarked cheerfully to the lecturer, when we were all packed into the waggonette, and Dutton had whipped up the horses.

"I tried not to be long, but I fear I was dull; was I very dull?" he asked pleadingly, turning to Fiametta. People so often asked Fiametta's opinion of things, though she

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was always ready enough to give it unasked. I used to think she obtained so much attention because she was always dressed in blue.

"I liked it," she said quite simply and sincerely; "I've never been to one before."

"Perhaps that's why," laughed the lecturer.

Mother looked rather puzzled. She was, however, seldom surprised at anything Paul might do or say. Seven years of him had taught her that the unexpected was always sure to happen. She knew that we had already met the "red giant," as we afterwards learned to call him, and asked no questions as to what had happened on that occasion. Mother never worried us with questions about trifles as do so many parents. She told me the other day that it was Paul who had taught her this beautiful reticence — a reticence immensely appreciated by children. In early nursery days when Paul was little more than a

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baby, somebody broke all the legs off the Noah's ark animals. Nurse suspected Paul, and cross-questioned him carefully, but he flatly denied the offence. Harry was sure he had done it, and enraged at his unveracity, shook him, crying angrily, "You must tell the truth! you shall!"

Paul lifted his queer, obstinate baby-face, and looking his brother full in the eyes, gasped firmly in between the shakes, "No — I sall — not — speak — ve troof, —'cause if I do, you — will be angry wiv — me. I sall not speak any troof at all!"

After schoolroom tea we all went out into the garden where we could be well seen from the drawing-room windows, in the hope that the friendly giant would see us and come out. Fiametta was for fetching him there and then, but *we* were not poet's daughters, and such a daring scheme was not to be entertained for a moment. If he wanted to come he'd come, and if he didn't come, then we should be reluc-

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tantly compelled to suspect him of inferior tastes, and would remove him from the pedestal he at that moment happened to occupy in the gallery of our admirations.

"I know he'll come if I sing," said Fiametta.

"Well, then, sing now," said Harry, "but, for mercy's sake, don't go on singing after he does come and we want to talk to him."

We had already suffered somewhat from Fiametta's habit of absorbing attention, for somehow she did absorb attention to a really aggravating extent. Last time Sergeant came, she sang to him all the time, and he told us nothing interesting as he usually did, and the worst of it was that he kept asking her to sing again!

"I sha'n't sing at all," she said huffily; "and you 're very rude. You see whether he comes if I don't."

"Don't what?" asked a voice, and there was the Giant in our midst; he had come

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softly over the grass while we were disputing; "if there are any people here who sing, I wish they would," he continued as no one answered.

"Fiametta sings," said Harry, anxious to make amends.

"Will you sing for us, please?" asked the Giant as he laid his long length on the grass beside us, peering up into Fiametta's face as she sat with bent head making a daisy chain.

"If I do, will you sing for me?" she answered — "just as if he was her own age," I thought to myself indignantly.

"Oh, yes, I'll sing, but we must come farther away from the house first, I make an awful row. Besides, all my songs have got choruses and you must all join in. Let's go and sit in the hayfield, it has just been cut and smells so jolly."

We scrambled to our feet, and he led the way across the garden and over the sunk fence to where "the happy hills of hay,"

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soft and scented, grey-green and clean, lay billowing in the rosy-tinted evening light.

We all cuddled down and the giant said, "Now, blue maiden!"

Fiametta took off her white cotton hat and draped the daisy chain round her head till she looked like Botticelli's "Primavera," then, in a little high-pitched voice absolutely sweet and true, sang the Basque song "Alza" in French, with much gesticulation and dramatic effect. It is a long song with abundant repetition, but as she had translated it, and it contained something of a story we consented to feel some interest in the *beau capitaine* who refused to sing "Alza" at the queen's command because

"Ninetta la belle, Ninetta l'infidèle
Avait, et pour toujours, oublié ses amours."

The giant was assuredly charmed by the performance, clapped his hands and shouted "bis," which proceeding we were disposed to resent as affected on his part; and Fia-

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Fiametta sang the Basque song, "Alza," in French, with much gesticulation and dramatic effect.

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metta was only too ready to respond to his enthusiasm and was just beginning an interminably long ballad about one "Don Fernando," when Harry pulled her over backwards into the hay, and reminded the Giant that *he* was to sing next. And this is the song he sang in a big bass voice that made the welkin ring:

"In dayes gone bye there lived a knighte,
His name was Thomas Crofte;
He 'd fought in war and tournament,
Full manye times and ofte;
He loved a maiden faire and slim,
A lovely maid was she,

Chorus

"And all he did was for ye maide,
And all she did for he.
Thomas Crofte, Thomas Crofte, loved ye faire ladye.

"Her father was a cruel lorde,
And lustily he swore,
That Crofte should never wed the maide,
Or cross his threshold doore;
Now Crofte had sworn she should be his,
And so of course you see,

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A Romance of the Nursery

Chorus

"That all he did, etc.

"One night, the wind was roaring loud,
Crofte mounted on his horse,
Rode forth, determined ere the dawn,
To take his love by force;
He tooke with him his vassals all,
A goodlie companee,

Chorus

"For all he did was for ye maide, etc.

"On that same nighte, ye lorde rode forth
With all his men at arms,
He 'd sworn to seize upon poor Crofte,
His castle, and his farms;
As luck would have it, neither met,
So each a castle lost,
And each a castle gained as well,
Unto the other's cost.

Chorus

"Thomas Crofte, Thomas Crofte, loved ye faire ladye.

"Ye lorde he took Crofte's castle
Without a single blowe,
For Crofte was not at home that night,
As you and I well knowe;

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Ye lorde then sate him downe to drinke,
With all his might and main,
And drank so much and ate so much,
He never rose again.

Chorus

"Thomas Crofte, Thomas Crofte, loved ye faire ladye.

"Now Crofte, he took a castle
Such was his wondrous lucke,
He got a pretty wife as well,
Without e'en one blow strucke;
His owne castle he got again,
And lived right merrilee.

Chorus

"For all he did was for his wife,
And all she did for he.
Thomas Crofte, Thomas Crofte, loved ye faire ladye!"

I have quoted the whole song because I have never heard any one but the giant sing it; it was a continual joy to us, as on no occasion did we ever meet him without demanding a rendering of this song, and time

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and place permitting, he never disappointed us. He was a man of parts, that giant, and bid fair to rival even Sergeant in our affections, for he knew all manner of wonderful things about plants and birds and the shy, small denizens of wood and field; moreover, he had the gift of "telling," and because to him these things were of the supremest importance and interest, his enthusiasm in its absolute sincerity was contagious, so that we also learned to use our eyes as we had never done before, and it began to dawn upon us that perhaps Natural History as studied by individuals — not by societies — might be possessed of hitherto unsuspected charms. One day when he was with us and we were all looking for a strayed hedgehog, he found a nest of black furry caterpillars in a bed of tall stinging nettles — such funny little black balls of fur they were, — like Persian kittens; he took the whole lot back to the house in his handkerchief — like us, he was by no means

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We took them in handfuls out to the front drive.

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particular as to the use he made of his handkerchief — and he made us a cage out of a big wooden box with a sliding glass front like a window. Holes were bored in the roof that the caterpillars might have plenty of air. It stood in the schoolroom window, and we fed them with nettles every day till they turned into chrysalis, and hung themselves up on the roof of the box for all the world like so many bats. By and by there came a great, a tremendous day, when the black sheaths burst, and out came the peacock-butterflies in their dozens. We took them in handfuls out to the front drive, watched them open and spread their wonderful downy wings gorgeous with blue and crimson and purple-brown, hover a moment on the kind little brown hands that held them up to the warm sunshine, then, timidly at first, and weakly, flutter away into the glad green garden; presently, as their wings grew stronger, joyfully sweeping hither and thither, so beautiful and

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lustrous that they seemed the incarnated spirits of the summer.

The whole household turned out to see them, and baby Lucy made a pretty picture as she stood on the front steps holding out her plump pink arms, that the sleepy "newborn butterflies" might take their first flight from off their soft, warm surface.

All that summer the garden was glorified by these living flowers, for some of them never deserted us, and in some dim, unconscious fashion, it is possible that we realised the blessedness of their presence.

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XII

THE PIANO-TUNER'S HAT

. . . as one bedizened with straws
And bits of glass.

W. E. Henley

WHATEVER Fiametta happened to be reading altered her whole character for the time being. So noticeable were these temporary transformations, that when they met at lunch father would call out cheerily, "And who are you to-day, little blue maid?" Whereupon Fiametta would gravely give him the desired information, proceeding by her walk and conversation (particularly her walk) to portray the character with an accuracy of detail, which she in no way extended to her ordinary studies.

Together we read and wept over "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a classic for which Miss

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Goodlake had profound respect. The boys did not like it. Harry said it made him hot all over, when people died and talked about heaven. Such scenes seemed to have an injurious effect upon his temper, for he usually relieved his harrowed feelings by punching Paul, and there was no end of a rumpus in consequence.

But in addition to "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Fiametta's visit to us had opened up to her an entirely new class of literature, — that of the goody-goody order, beloved by the sentimental governess, and still to be met with in the schoolroom libraries of country houses. Such works filled our souls with an almost homicidal vindictiveness. But Fiametta seemed able to regard the whole matter from an impersonal point of view. Her mental attitude was that of the anxious inquirer; the novelty of the thing attracted her; she immediately adopted the characters, one after the other, and would keep up the pose for hours at a stretch. She

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had one great grief, however; with a passionate craving she hungered after long hair, while her own, thick and short and curly at the ends, barely reached her shoulders, nor showed any signs of lengthening, prayed she never so.

Night after night she bombarded heaven with petitions that her hair might grow down to her knees, like the fair Persian's in the "Arabian Nights." Morning by morning she leapt lightly out of bed to feel behind her back whether she could yet reach it, and never could.

"Do you think it's a tiny bit longer, Janey?" she would ask eagerly, and I, with the frank brutality of youth, would give forth an uncompromising negative.

"If only my neck was shorter," she sighed, "my hair would be longer, would n't it?"

Yet even out of this trouble — and to Fiametta it was very real and abiding — like Sentimental Tommy she "found a

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way" in the shape of a large, white, crocheted antimacassar on one of the schoolroom chairs. This she commandeered, and fastened it round her head so that it flowed down her back and swung gracefully behind as she walked.

No mere words can express the comfort that this adornment was to Fiametta. By its means she enacted all her favourite heroines, and when she sported the antimacassar we knew that, so far as everyday life was concerned, she was of no earthly use.

For instance, did she flit lightly down a garden path, stopping at times to smell a rose, and smiling seraphically with a heavenly expression while she "hummed in a low voice —"

> "'I see a band of spirits bright,
> That taste the glories there;
> They all are robed in spotless white,
> And conquering palms they bear.'"

We knew that she was Eva in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and that the antimacassar

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represented a "golden haze of hair." And she was really seriously annoyed with the rest of us, because we absolutely, and with considerable heat, refused to enact the weeping slaves in her deathbed scene.

"You might as well," she exclaimed indignantly; "I could die so beautifully, and you've nothing to do but kneel round and sob, — I'll do all the talking, and it would be just like the book." But we were adamant. The characters of Uncle Tom, Aunt Chloe, and company held no charms for us. Even Paul, who usually was ready to "pretend" anything, drew the line here.

Did she walk slowly and painfully, with drooping head and downcast eyes, the antimacassar draped gracefully about her cheeks, she was the persecuted "Ellen" in that truly aggravating work "Home Influence," — a book which Miss Goodlake read aloud to us every day for half an hour after lunch, when we had to lie stretched

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on backboards. The antimacassar had its part in every character. She came to prayers in it one morning and enjoyed herself immensely, kneeling in a graceful attitude, while, owing to her position, it "flowed almost to her knees." She was transported with joy, and was only brought back to earth when mother, who always read prayers, and on this occasion lost her place, called her back afterwards, and told her she was not to wear it at prayers again, — an arbitrary and narrow-minded ultimatum, filling Fiametta with sorrow. However, she accepted it with meekness, for that day she happened to be the "playful Emmeline," and it would not have done to be rebellious in that character. Had she happened to be the "haughty Caroline," I tremble to think of the ructions that might have ensued.

Miss Goodlake had finished "Home Influence," and begun, so far as my memory serves me, upon a work entitled "Ruth

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Clayton: a Tale for Thoughtful Girls," a little thin volume with large print and highly coloured illustrations, which depicted Ruth as a being of superhuman neatness, who carried a basket on her left arm, and had long ringlets. It was evidently written with the intention of instilling into the youthful mind a clear conception of the beauty of order. It devoted whole chapters to the tidying propensities of Ruth, the heroine, and Fiametta — chiefly attracted, I verily believe, by the long ringlets — set herself to imitate Ruth with all her might and main.

She donned the antimacassar; it "flowed to her waist," and she took to putting away everybody's things with such goodwill, that we could none of us put down anything anywhere without losing it.

On the whole, nurse approved of this game. Fiametta, of the artistic temperament, was naturally extremely untidy, and left her things about everywhere; but dur-

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ing the Ruth Clayton incarnation, she was a model of neatness, and received nurse's commendation with smiles and curtsies (Ruth always curtsied when spoken to by her elders), and with graceful swings of the antimacassar. On the third morning Fiametta got up at five to gather strawberries (antimacassar and basket both to the fore) for Miss Goodlake's breakfast, and nurse, who always seemed to "feel it in her bones" when any of us had wet feet, pounced upon her as she came in, and found her so dreadfully wet that she had to change everything.

"What 's the good of going to get strawberries for Miss Goodlake now?" I had grumbled sleepily, as she got up. "There 'll be plenty at lunch."

"Ruth Clayton gathered strawberries for her teacher before breakfast, and so I shall get them for mine. I do wish I had 'a little pitcher of cream' to put with them. Do you think cook would give me one?"

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"I'm sure she would n't; she 's always awfully cross before breakfast," and I turned over and was soon asleep, while Fiametta, who pined for pattens, was picking her way delicately *à la* Ruth Clayton, on the path that led to the strawberry bed.

This was Sunday. On Monday the piano-tuner came. He used to walk out from Garchester every two months or so to tune both mother's and the schoolroom piano. We rather liked his visits, for he was a good-natured little man, who, if he happened to come in playtime, would let us stand round the piano and watch the entrancing little hammers twinkle in and out as he struck the keys.

On this particular day, however, we only came in from our walk as he was leaving. Fiametta was having her music lesson on the newly tuned schoolroom piano. When we arrived the little man was wandering round the hall in an aimless sort of way, and the parlour-maid asked him if he wanted

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anything, when he explained that he had mislaid his hat.

"I put it down on the hall table when I came in," he said, "but some one must have moved it; yet I don't see it on the rack." Neither did the parlour-maid, neither did we. There were a great many hats on the rack, but they all belonged to father, who fondly cherished the most ancient head-gear, and none of them in the least resembled the smart "topper" that always crowned the piano-tuner's immaculate frock-coated costume.

High and low they hunted for that hat, but nowhere could it be found. Finally both father and mother were apprised of the mysterious disappearance, and father good-naturedly offered him any hat he liked to go home in. But the piano-tuner looked at them askance, and when he finally tried one on, remarked pathetically that it "over-'atted" him, as it most certainly did.

He seemed loath to depart hatless, for fear

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of sunstroke, and was finally fitted with a "straw" belonging to Paul, — a hat with a singularly narrow brim adorned with a cheerful red ribbon. Under this covering the poor man set forth diffidently, as one ashamed.

Mother was quite distressed, for it really seemed that the hat had been stolen, and for the rest of the week feeble efforts were made to keep the ever-open hall door shut. Father, of course, wrote to the man to go and buy himself a new hat and send the bill to him.

On the following Sunday morning we heard nurse scolding in the boys' room, and there seemed to be such an excitement and so much noise, that Fiametta and I flew out of bed and across the passage in no time, to see what it was all about.

Nurse was standing by Paul's bed — he was in Harry's — in the act of laying out their "Etons" and Sunday things generally, and on the bed lay two top hats.

Now Paul had not yet been promoted

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to a top hat, and when Fiametta saw the two hats she burst into uncontrollable fits of laughter, exclaiming joyously, "I did it, I put it away. I saw it when I came in from my walk before the others, because it was my music lesson, and I thought it was Harry's, so I just thought I'd be kind and put it away for him. It was one of the Ruth Clayton days!"

Nurse turned upon her, and proclaimed her the "most hinterferingest child she ever see." Fiametta, hurt and indignant that no one else seemed to appreciate her excellent motives — or the joke — washed her hands of Ruth Clayton and all her works from that day forth.

After that we did n't lose so many things, and for a few days even the antimacassar was allowed to sprawl in leisured ease over its appointed chair. Fiametta had decided to impersonate some heroine who had just recovered from a fever, during which her "luxuriant hair" had all been cut off.

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XIII

THE DAY AFTER

O learn to love; the lesson is but plain,
And once made perfect, never lost again.

VENUS AND ADONIS

"I SUPPOSE," Fiametta said meditatively, "that we go to church to oblige God!"

It was Trinity Sunday, a strange dean had preached at our church, preached for thirty-five minutes, and there had been the Athanasian Creed as well. Therefore did Harry, Fiametta, and I sit on the lawn after lunch and comment freely upon the length of that same sermon.

"I never mind the sermon," said Paul, who was lying flat on his back, looking up into the elm for squirrels; "you can always think of something else."

"*You* can," said Harry bitterly.

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It was all very well for Paul; Sunday by Sunday he arranged some topic for reflection, which held him entranced so long as the sermon lasted. He played long games with himself, took imaginary and wholly delightful journeys, and generally enjoyed himself in a fashion singularly irritating to the rest of us who were not similarly endowed with powers of detachment.

"I seem to have to listen," sighed Fiametta.

"I never *listen*," said Harry, "but it interrupts me all the same. Now to-day I tried to make up my batting averages, but I got them all wrong. Come on, Paul, and see if any of those chrysalises have come out."

In silence we watched the boys till they disappeared behind the angle of the house; then Fiametta exclaimed discontentedly, "I'm tired of fields; I want streets and people. I long to hear the roar and rumble of cabs and 'buses and the jingle of the

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little bells on the hansoms. You've never been in London, Janey, and you don't know how dear and bustling and alive it all is. Oh, I want a noise, and people!"

"Well, you had noise enough and people yesterday, and when we got home you said how lovely it was to get into the country again." I rather resented any attitude of mind that could seem to disparage fields.

Fiametta didn't answer for a minute; she was sitting on the grass in her favourite attitude, her chin on her knees and her long arms clasping them, her eyes gazing wearily over the green stretch. Then she gave a big sigh, saying, "It's the circus that's done it. I was quite contented with the country till this morning, but now I want to go back to the circus, Janey, I want people."

"We can't go back," I said sadly; "they won't take us again, you know — we never go more than once to the same circus."

"Why not?"

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For the life of me I could n't tell. I only knew the sad finality of the fact, so I said feebly, "People don't, you know."

Fiametta scrambled to her feet, saying desperately, "Well, we must go somewhere, anyhow. There 's a boy getting birds' eggs by the copse yonder — let 's go and see what he 's found."

"He can't be getting birds' eggs, they 're all hatched."

"Well, let 's go and send him away; he 's not one of your peasants."

Fiametta had a way of talking of all poor people as peasants. It was like a French exercise and amused us greatly. Now she dropped lightly over the sunk fence and made straight for the boy through the long grass, I following somewhat unwillingly, for I was by no means eager to interview the stranger, having learned by bitter experience that trespassers are not uniformly civil, and having, moreover, a fellow-feeling for all such as sought sanct-

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uary in hedge, or ditch, or gay green undergrowth.

The boy saw us, and, leaning against the fence that separated copse from field, awaited our coming with perfect coolness. He was not a big boy — no taller than Fiametta — with a thin pale face, neatly and quietly dressed; his appearance was quite ordinary, save that in some subtle, intangible fashion, he differed entirely from either the village or such Garchester boys as crossed our fields on their way to bathe.

The grass in that particular field had not been cut, and our crossing left a long track which would have annoyed father exceedingly had he seen it. The boy looked at us, at the trampled grass, and then began to whistle.

It was the most odious, aggravating, suggestive whistle. It seemed to imply all manner of derisive things on the subject of trespassers, at the same time proclaiming with trills of exceeding clearness that this

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particular trespasser was fully alive to the value of hay, and that *he*, at all events, had come round by the hedge.

All this, and more, did his whistle convey what time he leant against the fence; even when we stopped quite close to him he continued to whistle and survey the country round just as if nobody was there.

Fiametta could bear it no longer. "What do you want, boy?" she asked haughtily.

"Nothin', thank you, Miss — nothin' at all," he answered, with an excess of civility that savoured of patronage.

"But what are you doing here?" persisted Fiametta.

"Nothin', Miss — cawn't you see?"

"But why have you come?" Fiametta continued, her voice getting more and more "essasperated" with each question.

"For to take the hair, and call on the fambly, which some of it ain't at 'ome, seemin'ly," said the boy, and he deliberately winked at me.

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Fiametta gave a little gasp, and flung up her hand as though to catch the wink as it passed. "Boy," she cried, "have you ever been in London?"

"'*As* your nuss ever rubbed your nose up the wrong way w'en she washed your face?" demanded the boy ironically.

"Certainly not," Fiametta answered hastily; "I should n't allow it."

"Well, little gel, I've been in the good old village a bit oftener than that, and I 'm goin' agen this side Christmas if I can fit it in — any messages I' can take to the royle dooks as is plainly your near relations?"

Fiametta had been staring hard at the boy during this speech, and now she gave a little cry and clutched my arm, exclaiming, "Why, Janey, it 's little Anthony!"

Here sure enough was "little Anthony" of the previous afternoon. It is true that the celebrity in question looked quite different in pepper-and-salt coat and trousers from the marvellous being in tights and

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spangles who rode three bare-backed ponies at a tearing gallop round the ring in his "marvellous equestrian feat"; but there was no mistaking face and figure once you penetrated the commonplace sheath of Sunday clothes.

"I am so glad to see you," Fiametta continued, flushed and radiant, "for now you can tell us all about the circus. How does one get into the circus?" She clasped her hands and looked appealingly at the boy; but he appeared quite unmoved, opened his mouth, and briefly ejaculated, "Gate money!"

"But I mean how does one act? Would they have *me*, do you think? I'd like so much to be a fairy!"

"Wot kin you do?" he demanded judicially; "kin you do this?" And in far less time than it takes to read the query, he flung himself into space, caught his cap in his teeth as it was falling, and resting his hands on the top bar of the fence held

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his body rigid in the air above us; and, before we had properly realised the wonder, was sitting on the top rail, apparently awaiting Fiametta's reply, unmoved, unchanged, not even flushed.

"I certainly can't do that," said Fiametta slowly.

"Kin you ride?"

"No-o-o; not well."

"Then you ain't no sort o' use to hus," said the boy decidedly. "If you was werry thin, or hextra staout, or hanythink at all art o' the common, you might 'ave a chanst as a freak; but you're the most ornariest little gel I ever see. You 'ave n't no sort o' chanst!"

Fiametta looked very mortified. "I'm *not* an ordinary little girl," she cried. "I'm —"

"Well," jeered the boy. "Haout with it — *wot* are ya'?"

"I'm a poet's daughter," she said proudly. "My father is a great artist;

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but you won't understand, though you — even you — are an artist in your way."

"Hartist? Blowed if I am!" he interrupted, for the first time losing his extreme calm; "none of your pavement blewin for me, I'm a cut above that, anyways," and he looked almost as indignant as Fiametta when he called her "the ornariest little gel."

"But you *are*," she persisted; "they call you so in the programme."

"Oh! Hawteest — I did n't quite ketch yer meanin'." The boy screwed up his mouth and whistled; Fiametta sat down on the grass and clasped her knees once more; but all the time she never took her eyes off "little Anthony."

"Boy," she began again, "are you happy?"

The boy stopped whistling, got down from his perch, picked a piece of grass and began to chew it.

"On'y this mornin'," he said slowly, "a

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hold lidy ast me if I was sived, an' now a bloomin' kid asts me if I'm 'appy! I never did!"

"Are they kind to you?" Fiametta continued, ignoring the indignity of "blooming kid." "I read in a book, and Miss Goodlake — that's Janey's governess — told me yesterday that they're not always kind to children in circuses. Do they love you?"

"Do they love me?" the boy repeated in accents of unutterable scorn; "they'd find theirselves in Queer Street if they began a-lovin' of me."

"But don't *you* love anybody?"

Something in her voice seemed to arrest his attention; he looked hard at her, asking suspiciously, "You ain't got any of them little books 'idden about ya', 'ave ya'?"

"What little books?"

"Them traxes."

"What are traxes?"

"Oh, you ain't got none — that's all right. Wot was it you ast me?"

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"I'm afraid," said Fiametta politely, "that you didn't understand me. I only said, 'Don't you love anybody?' I love so many people, and such heaps of people love me — my Daddie best of all," and, as always when she spoke of her father, Fiametta's eyes grew big and shining.

The boy looked at her, then back into the copse, and as he looked it seemed to me that something of her expression passed into his own eyes as he said gently, "We've all on us got folks as we're fond of." Then, in a shout, "All right, old girl! I'm a-comin'!" and, following his gaze as he turned, we saw a woman standing in the broad pathway that ran the whole length of the copse. She was quite a common-looking woman, fat and gaudily dressed, her hands full of willow-weed and columbines that she had gathered. "Pleased to 'ave met you," said the boy airily, as he swung himself over the fence.

"Wait one minute!" cried Fiametta

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hastily. "You've never told me if you like being in the circus."

"I likes it, an' I 'ates it," he said shortly, and turned catherine-wheels till he reached the woman. She put her arm round his shoulders and they walked away together.

"I'm glad there's some one," said Fiametta softly.

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XIV

CANON SIR JOHN

. . . happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart
With ghostly smooth life dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.

ROBERT BROWNING

HARRY had to go to the dentist to have a tooth stopped. Now there is nothing very surprising in that, but I happen to remember it because of something else that happened.

The dentist lived in a little street, called College Court, that led from the North Gate into the Cathedral Close. We rather resented the fact that he did live there, because we deemed it unsuitable somehow, almost verging on the irreverent, that any one should live under the very shadow of the Cathedral who was otherwise than picturesque or dignified in appearance. Most

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of the clergy living in the Close approached our ideal of congruity, though many of them fell far short of it — but the dentist! a little sandy-haired, feebly-joking "manlet," as Paul called him, with fat, soft hands, smelling of brown Windsor soap — such as he, we felt sure, had no right there.

And now, because mother had to pay a call on the other side of Garchester and did not want us, she had taken the carriage, leaving Fiametta and me, as well as Miss Goodlake, to wait at Mr. Boodle's with Harry. There was not a single new volume of *Punch* on the round table with the green cloth. We soon finished the current *Graphic* and *Illustrated London News* — why is it that dentists and doctors always seem to take in those periodicals? — and still Harry's summons came not.

We sat very still and talked in whispers, till suddenly Harry, who was sitting in the window trying to look unconcerned, exclaimed, "There 's Canon Sir John, and

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he's going home. Could n't the girls go round and ask him for some mulberry leaves for the silkworms? and we 'll call for them when Mr. Boodle has done with me!"

"Oh, do let us!" cried Fiametta, forgetting to whisper in her excitement; "he's got such a beautiful garden — and it's so pokey here. Besides, last time I saw him, he told me he hoped I 'd come and see him again soon."

"He said he hoped we 'd all come and see him again soon," I corrected. Fiametta had an aggravating way of appropriating all the pretty speeches. Miss Goodlake considered. "I don't like you going by yourselves," she hesitated.

"But you can see us out of the window till we 're nearly there."

"Well, you must go *straight* there —" but we did not wait for her to finish the sentence. We flew across the narrow passage and out of Mr. Boodle's front door,

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which we banged gleefully — through the Cathedral gardens, round by the flying buttress, and into the big cool porch, where we pulled Sir John's bell rather timidly; it was suspended from the roof of the porch by a long chain, with a fox's brush for a handle; we heard it pealing and clanging in some distant pantry, and felt almost wicked to have raised such a clangour in that still, dignified house.

Everything in Sir John's house was stately and polished and old. Sir John himself was old, living quite alone with several old servants, who adored him but deprecated the company he kept. For he, the handsomest, most courteous and hospitable cleric in the county, sometimes entertained strange guests. Sailor men from the docks, match-girls from the factories, mechanics from the waggon works, all came to visit Canon Sir John; and his was that old-time form of hospitality which considered the breaking of bread, to say

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nothing of the "cracking of a bottle," the essential part of a cordial welcome. He was not one of those sophists who let you depart after a ten-mile drive unrefreshed, with the feeble excuse, "I 'm afraid it 's too early to offer you tea." You were sure of your tea with Canon Sir John, even if you went to call at half-past two in the afternoon.

A very solemn, tall man-servant opened the door. First of all he gazed into space over our heads, then gradually, as if with difficulty, lowered his gaze till he brought us into focus with a sort of start of surprise.

"We 've come to see Canon Sir John," announced Fiametta, quite unabashed by his haughty stare. "We know he 's at home," she continued, "because we saw him go in and could n't catch him. If he 's in the garden, we 'll go to him there."

The tall man-servant hesitated for a minute, unbent so much as to smile, then waved his hand as though giving us his

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blessing, and with the words, "This way, madam!" (I wondered which of us he meant) led us through the cool, dark, oak-panelled hall, down a long, carpeted corridor, and out into the garden.

It was the most beautiful garden in a close that boasted many beautiful gardens. But this was the shadiest, the grassiest, and, as Paul put it, the "floweringest" of them all. A lawn of grass — just close-growing, velvet grass, with never a daisy, plantain, or even clover to mar its perfect texture — spread itself from the house to the far south wall where the peaches grew, like an emerald set in a border of innumerable other stones. The garden itself, with its broad paths bordered by great clumps of phlox, Japanese lilies, big rose-bushes, and multi-coloured Sweet Williams, always seemed in some way subservient to that exquisite lawn, which, in addition to a tulip tree and several fine beeches, boasted the largest mulberry tree in the county.

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A Romance of the Nursery

Canon Sir John was sitting under the tulip tree in a deep-seated basket chair. His hat and stick and an open letter lay on the grass beside him. But he was not reading. He sat forward in his chair, his long white hands clasped on the arms, thinking so deeply that he did not notice us as we came over the grass towards him.

"Now he," whispered Fiametta, "looks just right."

Involuntarily I looked upward at the great Cathedral, which, for all its size and grey age, never seemed other than kind and friendly, and then back at the tall old man seated in the basket chair, and I was reminded of what Paul had said that morning in lessons. He had been reading aloud to Miss Goodlake from one of those goody-goody tales she delighted in, where the writer pointed out the fleeting nature of personal beauty, maintaining that it was the appanage of youth alone — whereas beauty of character was permanent. Paul

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brought down his small fist on the page with a bang, exclaiming, "That's not true — there's some old people ever so beautiful. They've always been beautiful, and they always will be beautiful, beautifuller, and beautifuller, like Canon Sir John. He's ever so old, but I'm sure — "

"There may be exceptions, Paul," Miss Goodlake interrupted hastily, "but it is true of most people."

Paul turned him about, and looked long and earnestly at Miss Goodlake; then he sighed and continued to read without further argument. But, like his elders, Paul loved to "thresh out" a subject; so after lessons he joined Fiametta and me in the wheelbarrow, saying, "I suppose it's like this, Janey, if you aren't beautiful to begin with, you get less and less beautiful as you grow older. But it doesn't matter how you behave, either way. If you're nice and dear like Canon Sir John, all right; but if you're *not*, and as handsome as he

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is, handsome you'll be, whether you're good or not."

"I don't think he'd be quite so handsome if he was n't so nice," said Fiametta. "He's nicer because he's so handsome; but the niceness is there, you know."

Seventy years old was Canon Sir John, carrying his years as he carried his spare upright figure. He was clean shaven, with abundant white hair and kind brown eyes under very black eyebrows. There was nothing smudgy about the lines of his face; every feature was clean cut and purposeful. He rose now with a sort of start, as though he brought himself back to the garden and to us with difficulty; but his welcome was cordial and gracious as ever, and he did not forget to call after the retreating man-servant:

"Tea at once, please, Harvey, and plenty of peaches. We'll have it out here; and bring some more chairs — though really the grass is best of all, is n't it?" he said, turn-

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ing to us; "but if I get down I find it uncommonly hard to get up again."

"We'd pull you up," we cried in one breath.

"Ah, but I'm heavy. You've no idea how heavy! Will you let me sit in my chair instead?"

"Please do!" said Fiametta politely. "You look so nice in it."

"Do I? Do I, Janey?" he asked quite eagerly, turning to me. "Do I look pleasant? Do you think that if you had n't seen me for a long time, you'd be glad to see me again? Do you think that if last time you had seen me — years and years ago — I had been very cross and disagreeable, you would forget it now, or would my appearance remind you of it?"

"I'm quite sure I should n't remember it," said Fiametta; "but I don't believe you ever *were* disagreeable and cross."

"Do you think," he asked again, "that the garden looks nice? the sort of place

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one might be willing to come to anchor in, after long wanderings?"

"I think," said Fiametta, very seriously, "that it's like a king's garden."

"I hope he will think so," said the Canon softly, as if to himself. "He has never seen it."

"Who has never seen it?" we both asked.

"Ah," said the Canon, "that's my secret. Here's tea; I'll tell you when we've had tea."

I poured out tea, and Fiametta told the Canon about Harry. He was most sympathetic, but all the time I felt that it was with difficulty he made himself listen to us. He seemed all the time to be listening for something a long way off. He answered us at random, and presently forgot us so absolutely that we all sat in perfect silence watching the shadows lengthen on the lawn. At last Fiametta could bear it no longer.

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"You never told us the secret," she said, going up and touching Canon Sir John on the arm. "It 's very solemn out here all alone with the Cathedral."

The Canon seemed to give himself a little shake, then he said: "It *is* rather solemn. I have been all alone with the Cathedral for fifteen years; but it has done me good — it has done me a great deal of good. And now, for a bit, I 'm not going to be alone any more — if I 'm pleasant, and I 'll try to be pleasant. He is coming home!"

"Who is coming home?" we cried in a chorus of excited interrogation.

"My boy," said Canon Sir John. "I 'll tell you the secret — we disagreed about something. Fifteen years ago it was — it seems fifty! So hotly did we disagree that each of us tried to forget that any such person as the other ever existed. But we could n't do it, — we could n't do it. And now — it has come to an end. All the old, foolish, wrong-headed misunderstanding has

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come to an end. And you really think he 'll like it here?"

As if in answer the Cathedral chimes rang out across the stillness, those chimes that punctuate the lives of the Garchester people with pauses of melodied and perfect peace.

Presently came Harry and Miss Goodlake. I know that the Canon insisted that they, too, should have tea, and then we all crossed the lawn and went into the long passage leading to the hall.

Just as we reached it the door-bell clanged afresh. Canon Sir John stepped back into the garden. "If you will forgive me," he said hurriedly, "I will wait here; the children said that it looked pleasant here, and I would like him to think —"

"Come," said Miss Goodlake, hastily marshalling her flock, "there are other visitors; come quickly."

We followed her down the passage and into the oak-panelled hall. The door of

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the porch stood open, and Sir John's own carriage was outside; Harvey, the tall man-servant, was standing shaking a stranger by both hands, and the tears were running down his cheeks.

We were all passing out silently and unnoticed when Fiametta stopped, and pulling the stranger by the arm, said in a hurried whisper, "Tell him how nice he looks. He does so want you to think it all looks pleasant."

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XV

"THE SNUBNOSIANS"

It 's free to all the world,
That happy house of call;
You order just what you like best,
And never pay at all.

X. Y. Z.

THAT was not their real name, but Fiametta, in one of those flashes of inspiration which came upon her at times, hit upon it the very first time she saw them. Their noses *were* snub. Their real name was Rabbich, and their father had just rented a beautiful old place on the other side of Garchester for five years. He was, so mother said, "a good creature"; but as he was nearly always in London buying stocks and shares (we wondered vaguely whose shares, and of what), he did not interest us. Neither did Mrs. Rabbich, a

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large and rustling lady who spoke of us as "those darlings"; nor, for the matter of that, did the Snubnosians themselves, unless extreme irritation argues interest.

They were three little girls, exactly alike as three milk-jugs of different sizes. Their faces were large and round, their eyes very blue, their hair flaxen, and their noses so blunt and shiny that Paul suggested some nurse must have held them too near the nursery fire in infancy. He was thinking of the doll he spoilt.

The first time they came to spend the afternoon, shepherded by a Fräulein and a Mademoiselle, they stood together in a solid phalanx of scornful boredom against which our efforts to entertain them hurled themselves in vain.

Of course on arrival we took them into the garden, where Fiametta, with that readiness of hers which we so whole-heartedly applauded, suggested that "as we were such a nice lot we should act a play." But

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the Snubnosians gravely rejoined that they had not learnt their parts. We tried to explain that in our plays, what is familiarly known as "gag" was not only permissible, but essential; but it was of no use, they could n't understand.

All our suggestions were similarly vetoed; whatever we showed them, whatever we proposed to play, was met with some such scornful interjection as "Rot," or "Not that baby game," or "We should get dirty if we did that," and finally, "We 're not in the nursery"; whereupon Fiametta remarked with some heat that they "ought to be," and the eldest Snubnosian slapped her face.

It was not in Fiametta's nature to turn the other cheek, and a free fight seemed imminent, when suddenly she dropped the slim hand she had lifted so readily, saying slowly, "I must n't, they 're our visitors," and turned away.

"When we have a party," one of them

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remarked, "we always have niggers or entertainers from London."

And now the lot had fallen upon Fiametta and me to go and spend a whole long afternoon with the Snubnosians. How we prayed it would rain! But that day, in the midst of an unusually wet summer, the heavens were of brass, and three o'clock saw us bowling down the drive towards our doom. The one bright spot in an otherwise gloomy prospect was that Ovens, not Dutton, was driving us in the dogcart, and we both, Fiametta and I, could sit on the box.

Now, Ovens was young and conversed affably, unlike Dutton, who, when he was driving, seemed enveloped in an atmosphere of "Please do not speak to the man at the helm."

"Drive slowly, Ovens dear," said Fiametta, as we turned out of the drive gate; "take as long as ever you can, so that we sha'n't get there till tea-time."

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"I can't do that, Miss, I've got to meet the 4.30 train in Garchester after I've took you."

"O Ovens!" cried Fiametta, beseechingly laying her hand over his that held the reins. "Pull it in a little tiny bit." (Fiametta *would* always speak of a horse as "it," just as though a horse were a baby!) "You would n't like to be driven ever so fast to a place you did n't want to go."

"The mare, she won't be 'eld for no one," said Ovens reprovingly. The "it" rankled. "And why don't you want to go there, Miss?"

"Have you seen them, Ovens?"

"Them Rabbiches, do you mean, Miss? I 'ave, an' I 've seen their place, and a nice place I call it, though I do 'ear as they ain't quite like the rest of the Garchester gentry."

"They 're awful, Ovens; regular Snubnosians."

"Beg pardon, Miss, I did n't just ketch—"

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"Snubnosians, Ovens; conceited, obnoxious, disagreeable children."

"Law, Miss, you don't say so; but never you mind — there 's more fruit in them gardens than in all the shops in Garchester, and I *do* 'ear as they buys all the cakes in Fort's window every afternoon, let alone what they 'as from London. You 'll like it well enough when you gets there."

But Fiametta refused to be comforted, and when we arrived our worst fears seemed realised, for we were told to play hide-and-seek immediately, and were put on different sides by Fräulein, Fiametta being of the hiding party.

It seems she got separated from the others — there were quite a number of children besides the Snubnosians — and as nobody found her, she got rather tired of crouching behind a laurel bush all alone, and started off on an exploring expedition of her own, thinking she might get back into "den" before the search-party found

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her. She missed her way, however, and following a path, found herself in a veritable enchanted garden, so still and cool and green. "Like a great green room," she said afterwards, "with the sky for a ceiling."

And in the very middle of it close by an old sundial sat an old gentleman in a bath-chair under a white umbrella. The sun was shining full on Fiametta's little blue figure silhouetted against the green shadow of the yew archway, and she stood quite still, uncertain whether to go forward or not.

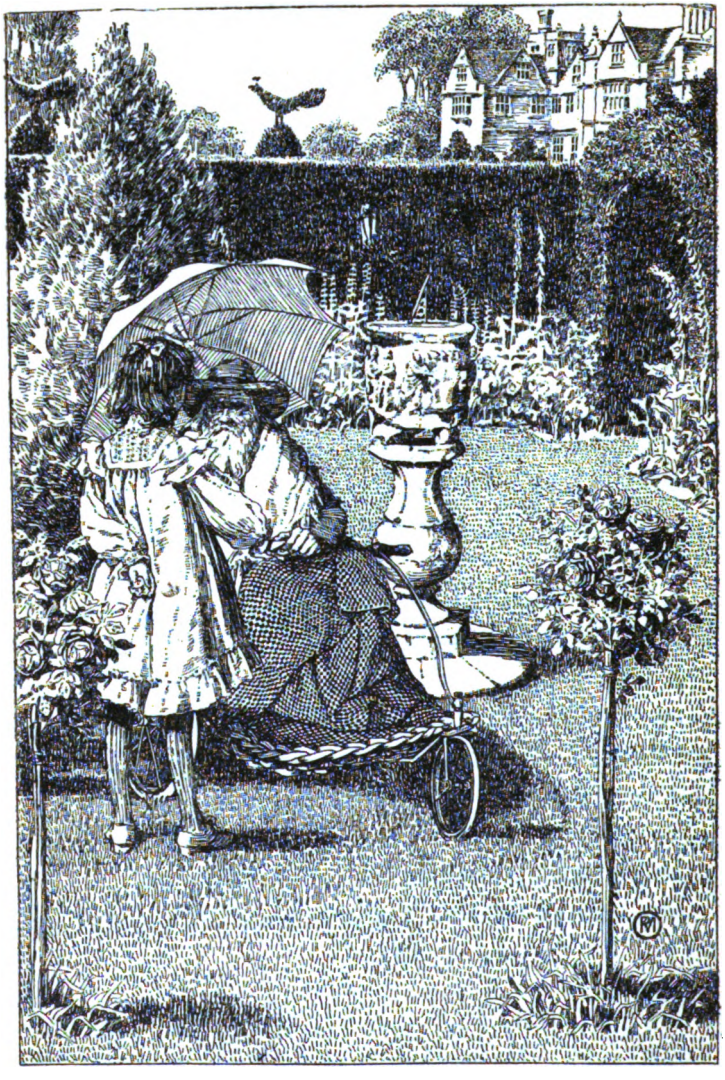
But the old gentleman had seen her and called out, "Little Miss! Little Miss! Come 'ere!"

Across the soft grass came Fiametta, fearless and friendly as always. "How do you do?" she said politely; "what a pretty garden this is!"

He was a very old gentleman, and what seems to have struck Fiametta most about

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He took the hand she held out and shook it warmly, exclaiming, "Pleased to see you, my dear."

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him was, that he looked so extremely neat and clean. His white hair fell in soft, almost babyish curls under his wide-brimmed hat; his whiskers, also white, were very trim, his eyes blue, and sure enough his nose was the family nose. "I knew in a minute he must be one of them by his nose," said Fiametta afterwards. "He 's very like them in the face, but he 's a thousand times nicer."

He took the hand she held out, and shook it warmly, exclaiming, "Pleased to see you, my dear. I don't see many young folks, nor old folks either for the matter of that, nowadays. Will you please to sit down where I can see you?"

"I 'm not tired, thank you," she answered. "I 'll stand by your chair, and then you can see me nicely."

The old gentleman stared at her for a minute, then he said, "Now I don't suppose as you could say me a piece, could you?"

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"He spoke very funnily," Fiametta said, "like gardeners and people."

"A piece!" she repeated wonderingly; "a piece of what?"

"A piece of poetry, of course," he said; "wot you learns to say to your teacher."

"Oh, dear, yes!" exclaimed Fiametta; "with pleasure." And with hardly a breath between she began:

"'Dear and great Angel would'st thou only leave
That child, when thou hast done with him, for me!'"

and said the poem right through. It was never a trouble to her to learn poetry; whatever she read, whatever her father read to her, she remembered. The old gentleman held her hand all the time, and when she came to the last line:

"'This is Ancona, yonder is the sea,'"

he gave it a little squeeze and sat forward in his chair, exclaiming eagerly: —

"That 's Brownin', that is — one of 'is easier pieces. It 's a long time since I 've

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'eard anythin' of 'is. Samuel, 'e reads to me w'enever 'e 's 'ere, and my attendant — I 've got a servant of my own, I 'ave, though you might n't think it to 'ear me speak — 'e reads; but they don't neither of 'em say it like you. Samuel 'e 's a mortal good son to me, but 'e don't seem to get into the 'eart of it some'ow. Now it 's funny, is n't it, as I should be so fond of poetry, but so it is, and so it 's always bin — and there 's more like me nor you 'd think for. W'en you spends all your days among bacon and butter, and teas and such, it 's rest and *re*freshment to get right away from it, as it were."

"I know," said Fiametta, nodding wisely, "you go to a magic place. So do I, every day."

The old man smiled at her and patted her hand, saying, "Ah, you 're one of the knowin' ones, you are. We all gets there, us as can — 'igh or low, eddicated or on-eddicated — they gets there some'ow if they

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can; but there's lots as can't — surprisin' lots as can't. It isn't readin' as makes you speak nice, though, it's them as you lives with and 'ears every day. I was forty years old before my luck came, but, bless you, I've bin and read more books than Samuel and 'is wife and 'is daughters 'll 'ave read if they lives to be eighty like me. But it never made me speak like they can, — *never*."

Fiametta stood by his chair rubbing one slim foot over the other, a little puzzled, feeling she ought to say something kind, but not knowing what.

"You were telling me," she said gently, "that you love poetry; so do I. My Daddie is a poet."

"Ah!" said the old man, shaking his head shrewdly, "it's better business to love it than to make it!"

Fiametta drew her hand away. "Poetry isn't a business," she said proudly. "You make it because God tells you to."

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He chuckled softly. "The ways of Providence is wonderful, and I'm grateful to them as writes it; but I'm glad Samuel now chose business. 'E's a wonderful good son to me, 'e is. 'E's a easy man, is Samuel; and Vi'let, — that's my daughter-law, — she does as she pleases, 'cept about me. W'ere Samuel is, there I am. I've got the largest bedroom and my own servant, and I lives on the best, but it's a bit lonesome times; and yet, now I sent my man away for a bit, most fortunate it was, for you come. And now 'ere's Samuel!"

Fiametta looked behind her and saw a stout, bald-headed gentleman in a white waistcoat coming across the grass. "Why, father!" he cried, "you've got a visitor." And then, as he reached the bath-chair, he stooped and kissed the old gentleman simply and kindly as a child.

"Yes, Samuel, and a very kind little lady she is. She've said me a beautiful long piece."

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"That was good of you," said Mr. Rabbich, turning to Fiametta. "There 's nothing my father enjoys so much as poetry."

Fiametta looked long and earnestly at Mr. Rabbich. He, too, had the family nose, but his eyes, as he stood looking down at his father, were so full of kindness that Fiametta was fain to lift his hand and kiss it.

"You are mistaken," she cried, giving the old gentleman's arm a little shake. "He *has* been there!"

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XVI

ON MATTERS EDUCATIONAL

I am bent upon probing life's mystery,
And I write seven essays a week,
I read pure mathematics and history,
And high metaphysics and Greek.

X. Y. Z.

TWO young ladies came to stay. They were both teachers in a neighbouring ladies' college, and one of them we were told was a prodigy of learning, — a B.A. like the curate, and ever so much besides. The other one had n't any letters after her name, but apart from this, and from all accounts, was almost equally gifted. We dreaded their appearance, but were comforted when we heard that the Giant was also coming.

"He will enjoy meeting such clever girls," mother said.

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"He will enjoy seeing me again," said Fiametta.

"Anyway, we shall enjoy seeing him," corrected Harry.

They all three came on Friday evening. It appeared that the young ladies had what is called a term holiday and could only stay until Monday. We cheered up.

One was called Rosomond and the other Eleanor. On first acquaintance (and afterwards) we liked Rosomond best, thinking it possible that she might turn out to be the identical, cruelly deceived, and evilly entreated Rosamond of the Purple Jar, the only one of Miss Edgeworth's child-heroines for whom we felt any affection. She gave us the impression that she had not entirely forgotten her own youth (though she must have been quite three and twenty), that she was enjoying her holiday, and might perhaps be instrumental in obtaining one for us. The Giant also seemed to approve of Rosomond; it appeared he had met her before,

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and he made it manifest that he was very glad to meet her again. She took an intelligent interest in dolls, and was not carried away by mere surface magnificence, for she gave fully as much attention to my poor Irene, whose hair was sadly thinned by over-zeal on my part, and whose clothes were neither new nor clean, as she did to the oriental splendours of Fiametta's Zuleika. Moreover, her voice was gentle and her hands soft. She gave her opinion diffidently and rather like a well-bred child, and had evidently spent most of her life in towns, for she was so rapturously delighted with all the country sights and scents and sounds that we took as a matter of course, —pleasant matter enough, but always there, like one's relations. Yes, we decided, she probably *was* Rosomond, just the sort of person Rosomond would grow up to be, tall and slim with a certain pretty sedateness of voice and manner, the result no doubt of all the repression and "learning

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by experience" she had undergone in her early youth. We would take her under our wing and be good to her, so Fiametta and I decided, only to find that Paul and Harry, after their various fashions, had come to the same decision. *They* would be good to her too! The result was that after tea everybody wanted to walk with Rosomond "round the place," while mother and the Giant had to entertain Eleanor, not that Eleanor missed us, — we very shortly discovered that, while expressing the very deepest interest in "childhood," for her, children had no separate identities: they were "types" or "results" of divers kinds of training. She belonged to some dreadful society that "studied" children as though they were "'ologies," and whenever she found a parent polite or meek enough to listen to her, gave forth her views.

"With children, one should be educating all the time," she said to mother, and we hated her forthwith; "they should be

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watched and guided in their play quite as much as in their studies, that every faculty may be developed equally. There is even a material register of our educational labours made in the very substance of the child's brain"; — the Giant shuddered — "organised games are so necessary because they afford opportunity for insight into character, and for self-discipline. How profoundly right, therefore, is Froebel in *his* games, where every action corresponds to some observed impression."

"But don't you think," the Giant interrupted, and we all stood still in the centre of the lawn to hear what he had got to say, "that more insight into character, and certainly an equal amount of give and take, and therefore self-discipline of the best sort, is provided by the games that children invent for themselves?"

"No," answered Eleanor; "no doubt some good purpose is served by the games children invent for themselves, but the

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games taught by the Froebel system correspond to facts, and advance the observation and knowledge of such things as should be familiar to every one."

The Giant did not answer, but Fiametta, as usual ready to take part in any earthly discussion, said gravely, "I fear that you are lacking in imagination!"

Eleanor settled her *pince-nez* more firmly on her nose and looked at Fiametta as though she would like to undertake *her* education there and then, when a material register of her educational methods would have assuredly ensued upon Fiametta's person. We all "chortled" inwardly. Lack of imagination was one of Fiametta's favourite reproaches to us, being a phrase of her father's; it was annoying when personally applied, but apparently Eleanor had no repartee ready, and we rejoiced.

In the course of our walk we came upon the swing, and it was an understood thing that whenever the Giant came he should

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swing every one of us in turn. So he swung Eleanor; she had pretty feet and smart shoes with buckles. He swung Rosomond and her hair came down; she blushed very much and seemed shyer than ever. After every one had had a turn Paul exclaimed:

"Now Tonks!"

Slowly and solemnly the Giant pushed the empty swing to and fro. This was an established ritual gone through whenever swinging was to the fore. "Tonks" was Paul's familiar spirit who went with him everywhere and for the last year had shared all his pursuits. A chair was set for him at tea, and he had a birthday about every three weeks; to this we had no objection, for cook always made a cake in celebration thereof. We were all quite accustomed to him, and even Miss Goodlake took his existence as a matter of course; but it was a proof that the Giant was one whose nature was "touched to finer issues" in that he

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had made friends with Tonks at the very first, and required none of those tedious explanations regarding him so often demanded (as in this instance by Eleanor) by strangers, and given somewhat grudgingly by his creator as follows: "He 's my foster brother; we was changed at birf, but we 've got right again now; he 's ten years older than me and 'normously strong. He 's going to be a sergeant when he 's grown up, but he can't go into the cavalry 'cause he 's too heavy — Sergeant says so."

We knew very well that the appearance of Tonks — if such a phantasy can be said to make an appearance — was traceable in the first instance to Paul's overwhelming desire to be a third son. Boots in the Norse Tales was at that time his favourite hero, and Boots is always the youngest of three brothers. Wherefore, as Providence had not seen fit to bestow upon Paul two elder brothers, he proceeded to remedy the omission after his own fashion. Once

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Tonks was introduced into the family there was no getting rid of him; his identity was firmly established, his character clearly defined, and there are many people with whom in childhood I came into daily contact, who are far less real to me than this droll, fantastic figment of Paul's brain, who could n't "go into the cavalry 'cause he was so heavy."

There was still half an hour before the dressing-bell would ring, and Fiametta and I took Rosomond to sit in the arbour. Presently the Giant came too, and we were a very tight fit. The arbour was hollowed out of a huge box-tree said to be two hundred years old; the box grew so close and thick that no rain would penetrate, and it was a favourite refuge on wet days if we could only escape from the house in time, but as it was at the very bottom of the laurel walk there was every opportunity of getting soaked before we reached it.

"Do you know," said Fiametta to Rosomond, "what it is like to be adored?"

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"Yes," said the Giant, before Rosomond could answer, "she knows perfectly well, but she does n't appreciate it."

"That 's a pity," said Fiametta. "I 'm adored but I appreciate it. I like it awfully!"

Rosomond said nothing. She seemed to be watching with the utmost concentration a snail crawling across the entrance to the arbour.

"My Daddie adores me," continued Fiametta, "and so do lots of his friends. People don't adore me quite so much down here. I wonder why?"

"I should think it 's because they 're not educated up to it," said the Giant gravely; "but if it 's trying not to be adored quite as much as one is accustomed to, think what it is to adore somebody who declines even to believe in your adoration. What would you do then?"

Fiametta looked up, sharply scrutinising both the Giant and Rosomond, but neither

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noticed her, for the Giant was watching Rosomond, and she was watching the snail.

"If she did n't believe me I should do a deed and make her."

"What sort of a deed?" asked the Giant.

Fiametta knitted her brows and pondered, then shook her head. "Sometimes even that 's no use," she said sadly; "there was Geoffrey Rudel—"

"How in the world do you know about Geoffrey Rudel?" asked Rosomond, waking up.

"Oh, my Daddie told me all about him, and I can say a poem—'There lived a singer in France of old'—"

"Do you think," interrupted the Giant, and I sympathised with him; Fiametta was far too fond of repeating poetry, and had infected Paul to such an extent that he made our lives a burden by going about saying all day long, "In a land of sand, and ruin, and gold" because he liked the

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sound of it. "Do you think that you and Janey could fetch your beautiful copy of the 'Arabian Nights' to show us?"

"I can go," cried Fiametta with alacrity as she darted out and danced down the laurel walk; "Janey need n't come — I know where it is."

But the Giant gently pushed me out of the arbour, whispering, "Don't let her find it too quickly, Janey, if you love me!"

I fled after Fiametta, and just outside the house we encountered father, who asked "what we were crafting."

On explaining our errand he suggested that it might rain, and that the "Arabian Nights" might get wet, which would be a terrible pity, that we 'd really better wait and show it to them when they came in, and finally that if we liked we might go there and then with him to see a new foal. In the excitement of this announcement we entirely forgot our guests, but I remember wondering as I went up to bed how father

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could have been so mistaken as to the weather; it had turned out a perfectly lovely evening.

It seems that in the meantime Eleanor had reflected that, peradventure, she might further her study of childhood by putting Paul through a sort of examination as to his knowledge of history, to which end she sought him in the schoolroom where he was helping Harry to oil his bat.

Eleanor was no diplomat; the "high seriousness" with which she regarded her ultimate aim precluded any frivolous "leading up" to the subject in hand. Seating herself in friendly wise upon the table, and swaying her very pretty feet, she began at once in a tone calculated to inspire confidence. "Now, tell me, who are your favourite characters in history?"

Harry, utterly panic-stricken at this unexpected and unprovoked attack, looked imploringly at Paul, who reassured him by a quick upward glance under his long lashes,

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then settled his face into an expression of such inexpressible sanctity, that Harry knew he was in for a good thing.

"I've only one *very* favourite car'rater," said Paul slowly.

"Tell me who it is, dear, and why. I am so interested."

"My favourite car'rater is Henry the Eighth."

"Henry the Eighth!" repeated Eleanor aghast; "why Henry the Eighth?"

"Because he was such a remarkable man."

"Remarkable! In what way? He was anything but an estimable man. What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you," said Paul confidingly; "you see *he* had more wives 'van children. Now, I've noticed most pertickler that most people have more children 'van wives. *He* had more wives 'van children."

"But that's no reason for *liking* him!" expostulated Eleanor.

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"That's why *I* like him," Paul replied firmly.

Eleanor looked hard at Paul, but he met her scrutiny with the gaze of a serious-minded seraph. "I can't say I admire your taste nor can I see your point of view —" she began, when the dressing-bell rang.

Harry speeded the parting guest by politely opening the door, shut it after her, and sank heavily on the nearest chair. "However did you think of old Henry the Eighth?" he exclaimed admiringly.

Paul turned head over heels joyously. "I gave her the first I thought of that I did n't care much about. I was n't going to give *her* any heroes! Fancy calling Drake and Raleigh 'fav'rit car'raters'! What cheek!"

"D' you think she guessed you were rotting her?"

Paul shook his head emphatically, then said meditatively, "I wonder why mother thinks her so clever?"

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Now the question is, *did* mother think her so clever? I often wonder too.

When I reflect how entirely unaffected by her seeming enthusiasm for every new thing was the actual course she took in our education, I begin to think that mother was really a good deal "cleverer" than the people she imagined she admired. That she thought she admired them there is no doubt, she was too absolutely sincere to pretend admiration that she did not feel; but I think she discriminated subtly and insensibly between what she knew was wise in practice, and what was as yet merely untried theory. She was quite open to conviction, even ready to make experiment, provided such experiment in no way interfered with what she deemed necessary and useful discipline.

For instance, although professedly a devout follower of Froebel and a member of those numerous societies and unions by means of whose organs "the educated

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mother" ventilates her experience, her difficulties, and more frequently her "views" as to the proper bringing up of children, yet kindergarten pursuits played but a very secondary part in our education. We were taught to read and to know our multiplication-tables, whether we found the process pleasing or not, but if, as was sometimes the case, we found the kindergarten handicrafts profoundly distasteful, they were not insisted upon. When first we were taught to make mats by threading different coloured strips of paper transversely after the manner of darning, Paul finished his before any of us. He laid it on the table, and after glaring at it with immense dislike for some minutes, crumpled it up into a ball, exclaiming, "It's perfectly hideous! hideous! hideous!"

Poor Miss Goodlake, who was pleased that Paul had so quickly mastered the necessary knack, was greatly distressed at this wanton destruction of its result, and in

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the middle of her lamentations mother came into the schoolroom.

The matter was laid before her, likewise the crumpled square of woven strips of shiny red, black, and blue paper.

"It 's certainly not pretty," said mother, "nor is it of any earthly use. Paul need n't make any more; he may do sums instead."

Now Paul hated sums, for, as he pathetically remarked, "the oftener you add a line up the differenter it comes." His only consolation was that "Tonks never got any answers right at all!"

For mere sentiment mother had but small toleration, and endearments carrying with them no kindliness of deed found but small favour in her eyes. A certain gushing family of young cousins used occasionally to stay with us, who never addressed each other save as "love," "darling," or "sweetheart," who quarrelled incessantly, and exacted grown-up interference to settle their quarrels. This we considered deplor-

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ably bad taste, and entirely against all recognised nursery and schoolroom etiquette. Our aunt, mother's sister, not infrequently deplored our seeming coldness and lack of affection one for another, and mother would smile and say carelessly, "Oh, they 're fond enough of each other, but we 're not demonstrative as a family."

One day as we elder children were sitting at lunch, there was a fearful bump overhead, followed by heartrending shrieks and yells; my aunt jumped up in haste prepared to fly to the rescue, but mother pulled her down in her seat, saying quietly, "Don't excite yourself, Adelaide, it 's only sweetheart who has knocked down my love!" And so it was; and as "my love" had been sitting on a high chair, she fell with considerable violence.

We liked Aunt Adelaide, but we loathed our cousins, who were, as Harry put it, "the eeniest-peeniest chits you ever saw."

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XVII

CHIEFLY HISTRIONIC

"The play 's the thing."

"TO-DAY 's so wet, too wet even to play travellers; let 's act 'Macbeth'!"

This proposal, made by Fiametta, who had early appointed herself a sort of M. C. as regarded our various plays, was received with acclamation which speedily degenerated into heated altercation as regarded the arrangement of the cast. We had acted a great many plays since Fiametta's arrival, and I began to rebel at being always allotted a thinking part wherein I had to simulate sleep, or a murdered slave, or was loaded with chains and haled to prison early in the performance. Thus when I was immediately fixed upon to impersonate the sleeping Duncan — of course we proposed to play the murder scene, the sleep-

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walking, and the witches' cave — I expostulated. ' I might just as well have given in gracefully at first, however, for although Paul consented to play Duncan, if he might also be the eight kings in the witch scene, I was in the end fobbed off with the part of one of the drugged attendants, while Lucy was the other. Previous to Fiametta's arrival our plays had always been entirely independent of costumes or scenic effect, but she introduced us to the joys of dressing up, making a stage, and acting "as they do in a real theatre." Our attempts at impersonation "when dressed for the part" required perhaps more imagination on the part of the beholder than if we had let it alone, but although illicit borrowing of other people's things got us into constant trouble, the cult once started was too fascinating to be abandoned.

The schoolroom was the theatre, and Dorcas, the schoolroom maid, comprised the audience. An appreciative person was Dorcas,

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much given to exclaiming at intervals, "Lor! Miss Fymetty, it be as good as a play!"

King Duncan, a paper crown upon his head and a beard of cotton-wool upon his chin, lay draped in the schoolroom table cloth upon the schoolroom sofa, which had been wheeled into the centre of the stage. The blinds were pulled down and perfect stillness reigned in the apartment, for the watchers slept at their post, each lying in an untidy heap intended to suggest supreme unconsciousness; one at the head, the other at the foot of the kingly couch. One watcher's wounded feelings had been somewhat soothed by permission to wear two of the by no means numerous stage properties belonging to the company; a black wide-awake hat drawn well over the face — it required but little drawing as it threatened momentarily to extinguish its wearer — and a mackintosh cape. The other watcher's extra costume consisted of a waste-paper basket worn as a helmet.

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"Lord and Lady Macbeth," as Dorcas always called them, presently appeared from behind the window curtains, and the audience was heard to observe, under her breath, "My! don't she look hawful!" Lady Macbeth carried a lighted taper in her hand — a wooden spill such as father used to light his pipe — and the audience again interrupted with an injunction "to be careful of that there light, else you 'll set the 'ouse on fire." So Lady Macbeth blew it out and advanced to the centre of the stage. Her face was white as blackboard chalk could make it, and she wore a long, white nightgown belonging to Miss Goodlake borrowed without the formality of a request, that lady having gone to spend the day in Garchester. It always rained when Miss Goodlake went away for the day.

In spite of the chalk, in spite of the nightgown, in spite of the audience, there was something really tragic about Fiametta as she exclaimed:

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"'Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers: the sleeping, and the dead,
Are but as pictures: 't is the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed
I 'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt.'"

Macbeth, also white as a Pierrot, stood gloomily aside while his wife smeared the faces of the attendants with the sticky cake of crimson lake artfully concealed in her hand; then suddenly improving upon Shakespeare in the most daring fashion, she seized the brass paper-knife shaped like a dagger — one of Harry's most cherished possessions — and exclaiming loudly, "So perish all our enemies!" plunged it into the breast of the sleeping king.

"You 're a beast, you 're a brute, you 're a mean cad! You 've killed me really, you horrid, nasty girl! and *you* ought n't to do it in the play either — ow — ow!" and Duncan with angry howls arose in his wrath and flung himself upon Lady Mac-

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Duncan, with angry howls, arose in his wrath and flung himself on Lady Macbeth.

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beth. Her feet got entangled in the long nightgown, and they both rolled over each other onto the floor, where Fiametta's shrieks were mingled with Paul's howls, and Dorcas hurled herself into the press to separate them. Harry, in fits of laughter, sank feebly upon the sofa, while Lucy and I, quite unprepared for the unexpected turn things had taken, sat where we were and awaited developments, till Lucy, suddenly discovering that her hands were red, became convinced that she also must be hurt, and mingled her roars with those of Paul and Fiametta. The schoolroom door opened, and father, of all people, walked in.

"What on earth!" he exclaimed, then stopped, and at his entrance the yells also ceased. Dorcas scrambled up from the floor and busied herself in pulling up the blinds, trying to look as though she had only that minute appeared upon the scene and found it a shocking spectacle.

"We're acting 'Macbeth,'" I explained,

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as no one else offered any answer to father's unfinished question.

"It's a somewhat noisy drama, apparently," said father dryly. "Sir William, who is downstairs, asked if I had suddenly started a lunatic asylum, and that if not I'd better go and find out who was being murdered!"

"*I've* been murdered," sobbed Paul. "I have really; it's awfully sore."

"Get up!" said father unfeelingly. "Get up and don't play the fool any more; how could you bellow like that if you'd been even badly hurt?"

"He got it in the wind," Harry explained.

"Got *what* in the wind?"

"This!" cried Paul, dramatically holding out the brass dagger; "she killed me again after Macbeth had done me, an' I did n't like it; it is n't in the play, neither."

"*I* killed him," said Fiametta in a George Washington sort of tone. "I always

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wanted to do the murder as well as the sleep-walking, and it seemed such a good chance. I knew he would n't let me if I asked him because he *will* go by the story; besides, Harry wanted to do the murder. I did n't mean to hurt him, but I forgot and really plunged it, but he 's hurt me since, and he 's spoilt the play. I suppose he 's too little and too young to act, really."

Father's eyes twinkled as he looked at the queer little couple still seated on the floor. Fiametta had regained her "superior" manner, but Paul still thirsted for her blood, and this allusion to his age and size, ever a tender point with him, was almost unbearably aggravating.

"Sir William wants to see you, Paul, if you 're not too seriously injured to come down. Clean up and hurry!" and father turned and left the room without further remark, but we heard him laughing as he went down the schoolroom stairs.

"You 're a couple of sillies," said Harry

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scornfully, when father was out of hearing, "to go and *complain* of each other to parents and people. It 's jolly lucky for you it was father; if it had been mother, or Miss Goodlake, or nurse, we 'd have been forbidden to have any more plays, but of course father does n't notice such nonsense."

"Shall I do the 'perfumes of Arabia' bit for you and Janey?" asked Fiametta sweetly.

"No, thank you, I 've had enough of 'Macbeth' for one day," said Harry scornfully, which was rather unfair as he had certainly been well amused.

"Would *you* like me to do it, Dorcas?"

"No, Miss, you 'd best go and clean yerself and get that there chalk off your face and that 'orrid paint off your 'ands. I don't 'old with all this play-acting. It quite turns me over to see you a murderin' like as if you was brought up to it. I don't know what nuss ud say."

So even Dorcas, usually so full of appre-

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ciation, turned against us that afternoon, wheeled the sofa back into the window, "tidied up" aggressively, and finally departed with a haughty sniff to the kitchen regions, where, as we passed the window some half-hour later, we heard her holding forth to cook as to the "fool'ardy nonsinse them children do do."

We were rather hurt, for we had hoped better things of Dorcas. I fear she was not a sincere person.

With Fiametta's arrival "acting" had become a passion with us. We had all been to the pantomime, but she had been to real grown-up plays in London theatres, had even acted in theatricals where the audience had paid for their seats, and provided she played leading lady was ever ready to stage-direct the rest of us. Our tastes lay in the direction of the "legitimate drama," but Fiametta tried to introduce amongst us certain modern romantic plays which she had seen, where the heroine

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is much given to fainting. She loved to stagger across the floor, wringing her hands and clasping her forehead till she finally subsided gracefully into somebody's arms. The Vicar's son, who frequently joined us in our various plays, found this sort of thing extremely irksome, and I believe on one occasion explained his refusal of an invitation to tea with us on the score that "Fiametta always wants me to catch her when she faints, and I do loath it so." I think that the "Lady of Lyons" was the play under rehearsal at the time.

When nurse undressed Paul that night she found a big blue bruise on his side, which he explained by supposing he had "knocked up against something," which explanation reminds me of one of father's men who, after a hay supper, appeared with a most terrible black eye, and accepted commiseration thereon with the remark, "Ah, a door run agin me last night."

When Paul returned from his interview

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with Sir William, his face literally shone with rapture. "What do you think he wanted me for?" he cried. "Why, Brenda has got five puppies, and he's going to give us one all for ourselves, a gentleman puppy, when he's over the distemper — he asked father if he might. An' it 'll grow bigger an' bigger till it 's bigger, even, than Brenda. Fancy, *we* shall have a deer-hound, too, then!"

It was characteristic of Paul, that, in bringing us this tremendous intelligence, he in no way emphasised the fact that this royal gift was to be made to him, and to him only. Even Fiametta, with whom he had been quarrelling so violently five minutes before, was included in the general beatitude, and not too severely snubbed when she suggested that if we had a deer-hound we could act "Beth Golert"!

It was Saturday afternoon, and we stood staring at one another in horror-struck si-

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lence as the naked fact in all its sinister significance came home to us, — Fiametta had run away, and because we were so unkind!

The boys, including Claude from the vicarage who was spending the afternoon, sat on the shafts of a hay-cart, while I, breathlessly struggling with a dreadful lump in my throat, broke to them the awful news that Fiametta was not to be found in any of our usual haunts, and it was nearly tea-time.

An hour ago we had quarrelled violently on the eternal subject of what we should pretend to be. The boys were in favour of a siege, — Fiametta, Paul, and I to be the besieged, firmly entrenched in the summer, house, to repel the enemy's advancing army by means of catapults charged with paper pellets. Fiametta said she would defend no fortress unless she might be wounded and carried on a stretcher the whole length of the tennis lawn, Claude and Harry to be the bearers. They demurred, saying she

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was too heavy; she charged them with feebleness and sloth; they retorted to the effect that she was a "a silly ass, always wanting to die or faint or some such tommy rot," whereupon Fiametta slapped Claude's face and said he was "a boor."

Claude did not retaliate, but he got very red and said he'd better go home. This we would not hear of, but declared that as Fiametta would not play peaceably we would play without her, which we proceeded to do.

After informing us with considerable heat that we might play without her forever and ever, for she'd never play with us again, she walked off, and we forgot all about her, as what Mr. Grimstone would have called our "mimic warfare" was really most exciting. It was not until the last round of paper pellets had been fired out of the summer-house window, that the besieged garrison gave in, and conquerors and conquered remembered Fiametta.

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"She 's run away, I know she has!" I cried hopelessly, "and what will Mr. Glynn say? And I promised to be kind to her."

"We must tell mother," said Harry decidedly. "I don't know what she 'll say—"

"Let 's tell father first," suggested Paul, "and he 'll tell us what to do."

This seemed a good suggestion, so we followed it and crept softly and sorrowfully in at the side door and down the passage to the gun room. Mother called it the "study," but there were more guns and whips and spurs and things than books.

Father was making trout flies. "Hullo, what window have you broken this time?" he exclaimed as the four of us filed in.

"It 's worse than a window — it 's Fiametta," Paul began.

"What? Have you hurt the little maid? Where is she, quick!"

"She 's run away!"

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"Run away — why?"

"'Cause we would n't let her be dead and carry her."

Father drew Paul between his knees. "Now, Paul, talk sense. It 's some game, I suppose, and you 've quarrelled; but why should Fiametta run away?"

"We called her names, and she went, an' we forgot her, and now we can't find her anywheres, not anywheres in the house or garden."

Father frowned, and looked grave. "Where would she run to, do you think?" he asked at last.

"Tonks thinks she 's gone to the docks to find a ship to go to Norway where her father is," volunteered Paul.

"Oh, that 's what Tonks thinks, is it? Have you told mother?"

"No; we thought you 'd help us to find her without bothering mother."

Father smiled, then said gently, "Poor little maid, you 're not very kind to her,

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and she 's been simply wonderfully good, when you think she 's never mixed with a lot of countrified young ragamuffins before. Wonderfully good she 's been."

"But where is she, father?" I cried. "Are n't you anxious? It 's tea-time, and over an hour since we 've seen anything of her."

"Go once more, right round the place, call at all the cottages, and if by that time you don't find her, come back to me and I'll send to the docks, as Mr. Tonks suggests."

Once outside we scattered to the four winds of heaven in different search-parties, only to meet again some half-hour later hopelessly dismayed, for no one of whom we inquired had even seen Fiametta that afternoon.

"I 'd carry her, myself, a mile, if I could find her," groaned Harry.

"I 'd be a lover-Duke and let her faint all afternoon if she 'd only come back,"

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sighed Claude, who was kind-hearted if he had no appreciation of tragedy.

"Tonks thinks she 's falled into the river like Ophelia," said Paul.

At this truly awful suggestion I wept; then feeling that in great emergencies there was only one thing to be done — to tell mother — we all four marched slowly to the drawing-room, where we knew she was having tea with her visitors.

The door was ajar; I pushed it wide open and flung into the room, followed pell-mell by the distracted boys — Paul already convulsed with sobs at the heartrending picture he had drawn of Fiametta, blue-gowned, with daisies in her hair, floating forlornly down the stream; and there, enthroned on mother's knee, calmly eating a spongecake, cool and contented, evidently enjoying herself, with no trace of moisture about her soft blue frock, sat Fiametta, while father stood on the hearth rug discussing turnip weevils with the Giant. We did n 't wait

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to offer any explanation of our sudden invasion, but departed as abruptly as we came.

"I was homesick," explained Fiametta that night as we went to bed; "you were all so horrid, and I wanted my Daddie. Your mother was next best, so I went and found her and sat on her knee."

"Did she ask you why you came?"

"No, she never asked anything. She just cuddled me and was as sweet as sweet. I do love her, and she let me have tea in the drawing-room to cheer me up."

"You frightened us awfully; we never thought of the drawing-room, and we were afraid to tell mother."

"So they say," said Fiametta with considerable gratification in her voice.

Directly after tea father sent for us, and asked what we had done to Fiametta to have such guilty consciences.

"How would you like it, sir," asked Claude, who was n't in the least afraid of

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father, he 'd got him out of so many rows, "if you had to keep catching somebody in a faint?"

"I 've not had much experience in that line," said father, and his eyes twinkled; "but if it gave a visitor pleasure to faint in my arms a few dozen times I 'd try to be obliging."

"I 'll *try*," groaned Claude, "but it is such *squish*."

The problem that exercised us was — did father know all the time that Fiametta was in the drawing-room?

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XVIII

A REALLY THING

It is the season now to go
About the country high and low,
Among the lilacs hand in hand,
And two by two in fairyland.

R. L. S.

THERE was a tennis party, and from the schoolroom window we watched the people on the lawn. We could see father, and mother, and Miss Eleanor, and Miss Goodlake, lots of the people from the Close, Sir William's two tall, high-nosed daughters, — even Paul could not surround them with any halo of admirative romance, — but nowhere could we descry Rosomond and the Giant, and the society of Rosomond and the Giant was what we coveted. "Don't let 's go onto the lawn, let 's go and look for them in the orchard; I know they 're there," suggested Fiametta.

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I was nothing loath, only too thankful that for once Fiametta showed no desire to join the company long before we were sent for; all the same I felt a misgiving that perhaps the truants might not particularly desire to be found. Still, as Rosomond was going that evening, that Eleanor was going too caused us no regret. In our nightly parliament, on the shafts of the hay-cart, we had agreed that B. A.'s — lady B. A.'s — were as bad as the average lecturer, lit'ry *and* scientific; worse in fact, for they, at least Eleanor, asked more questions. Quite unconsciously we realised and instinctively resented that she was "studying" us all the time, classifying us, and arranging our characteristics under the heading of "types." She talked incessantly, and the path of her discourse was liberally bestrewed with such phrases as "abstract conception," "constitutional tradition," "philosophic right," "compassable end," and the like. We did n't in the least understand her remarks,

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but Paul, as usual, seized upon the new words and garnished his conversation with sonorous phrases having no earthly bearing on what he wanted to say, thereby rendering the majority of his remarks unintelligible to the lay mind.

"Psychic force" was a phrase that filled him with joy, and as we passed his garden on our way to the orchard, we found him "telling a story" to his lead soldiers, as in a straggling, unsteady line they made their moveless march through a forest of gravel flower.

"And the psychic force came rolling with a nawful dark-blue sound,
And the psychic force came rolling till it squashed them flat as flat."

The soldiers did not seem at all impressed by this dread prophecy, though it is true that one of them fell over onto his side; but a lumbering red-nosed beetle had something to do with that.

From the time that Paul first learnt "Of

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man's first disobedience," he delighted in attempts at blank verse, the "meaning did n't matter" in the least if there was some approach to rhythm. One of his efforts descriptive of dawn, began:

"The mournful moon has ta'en his trousers off,
And all the stars, they have cast down their shoes."

I quite forget the rest, but I know that we all thought it rather fine.

Paul, on this occasion, declined to accompany our search-party, as the psychic force had not nearly done with his soldiers, so Fiametta and I strolled leisurely through the kitchen-garden, refreshing ourselves with young peas as we went.

"What makes you think they've gone to the orchard?" I asked.

"Because you can't see it from any other part," replied Fiametta the sophisticated. "The garden wall's too high, and the people in the road can't see you because of the

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hedge; besides, there 's the paddock between, and look how thick the trees are in the orchard. Janey!" — and Fiametta grasped my arm with as much emphatic confidence as though she had prefaced her remark by "hist!" — "Janey, I believe that the Giant wants to marry Rosomond!"

The same thought had occurred to me, but I would have died rather than give expression to it. "Why don't you answer, Janey?" she continued. "Don't you think so, too?"

We reached the door leading to the orchard, and it stood ajar. What would father have said, and all those young chickens in the orchard! We shut it carefully after us, and peered about under the dear, crooked, wide-branched trees.

"There they are!" cried Fiametta. "See! I told you so."

And behold the Giant and Rosomond were advancing towards us hand in hand, and in their faces there was a brightness

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not wholly to be accounted for by the late afternoon sunshine touching them so tenderly. They looked very tall as they came over the dappled grass together, and I thought how father had said the other evening that they were "a fine upstanding couple," — father liked tall people.

"Blue maiden!" the Giant called out when he saw us, and his big, strong voice seemed a trifle husky; "the princess has relented."

"Ah, I knew she would!" and Fiametta nodded wisely as one who understood and regarded with amused toleration the ways of woman, and of princesses in particular.

"How did you know?" asked Rosomond, and she gave me her other hand to hold although I had said nothing at all.

"Because they always do," Fiametta replied triumphantly. "There 'd be no story if they gave in at the very first."

"There has n't been much story as it is," and Rosomond gave a little sigh, then lifted

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her eyes and looked at the Giant and laughed the happiest little laugh.

"It's the most wonderful story in the world," said the Giant; "and there's next to none of it told yet. The interesting part is all to come."

"I'm so glad it isn't that B. A. person," I said with a sigh of relief.

The Giant and Rosomond looked at one another, — they did that all the time, though, — and Rosomond took my chin in her hand and turned my face towards her. "What do you mean, Janey?" she asked. "What is your objection to B. A.'s?"

"I'm glad it isn't Miss Eleanor, anyhow."

"But she isn't a B. A.," the Giant exclaimed.

"Well, mother said that one of them was a B. A., and of course we thought it was her," I replied, too puzzled to concern myself with such trivialities as grammar. "Who is the B. A., then?"

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The Giant took Rosomond by the shoulders and shook her gently. "You must never tell of her," he said. "I've promised to try and overlook it myself, and, as you see, no one would ever guess that she knew more mathematics than anybody else, so it doesn't really matter. I've quite forgotten it."

"He needn't be so proud," Rosomond interrupted; "he's got a whole alphabet after *his* name."

"I don't think letters after a name matter much, if the person and the name are both pretty," said Fiametta thoughtfully, "and Rosomond —"

"Fulfils both conditions," cried the Giant. "And now we must go and have tea with the others." He held out his hand and Rosomond put hers into it, and they went away through the door in the wall, leaving it wide open again. We stood in the shadow and watched them as they walked swiftly hand in hand down the broad, sunny, garden

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path, with the tall, white lilies on either side; it suddenly felt cold in the orchard and a little lonely, for they had n't asked us to go with them.

When we got back to Paul, he was still retailing the devastations of the psychic force to his soldiers. In great excitement we proceeded to tell him the news. "It 's Rosomond who is the B. A., and she 's going to marry the Giant, and not Eleanor at all," I concluded, as a sort of chorus to Fiametta, who, of course, got the news out first.

"What 's he done to make her?" asked Paul, getting up from his knees and looking at us with the queer dazed expression he always wore when suddenly interrupted in one of his plays.

"Oh, I suppose he asked and asked, and worried and worried, and was very unhappy —"

"But what 's he *done?*"

"I don't think real grown-up people do

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much," I rejoined sorrowfully. "Isn't it funny, though, that Rosomond's the B. A., not Eleanor?"

"What's a B. A.?"

"I don't know, but it's something very learned, 'specially for a lady. Didn't you think Eleanor was the B. A.?"

Paul grinned. "She's softer than Dorcas, really. She'll believe anything silly; but the really things, she says, are 'maginations. Now Rosomond is n't like that; she understands, so does the Giant."

"The Giant is a darling," said Fiametta with decision, "and I'm going to see all the people. You can't come, Paul, for you're all over mould."

Paul looked ruefully at his dirty smock. He liked society, and Sir William would be sure to drive his daughters back.

"D' you think I might leave my soldiers here all night?" he asked. "They're so happy."

I stooped down and looked into the little

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forest of gravel flower, and sure enough the leaden men looked singularly *debonnaire* and jaunty in the pleasant pinky shade. Was this, also, one of the "really things," I wondered?

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XIX

MADAME LAFERRE

. . . my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks — no one's:

ROBERT BROWNING

EVERY three years there is a gala week in Garchester, the musical festival held at the Cathedral. Every big house in the surrounding country is filled for it; visitors flock from the neighbouring towns; the old city blossoms into bunting, and its narrow streets are thronged with pretty ladies in holiday attire.

As a rule our part in the festival was confined to an occasional drive into town to take mother and her guests to the Cathedral; but this year Mr. Glynn had taken tickets for Miss Goodlake, Fiametta, and me, for both the "Messiah" and the

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"Elijah," and it is doubtful which of the three of us was the more elated. Perhaps Fiametta took it most coolly, she had been to many concerts in London, but never "to one in a Cathedral." Moreover, the "voiceful Canon" had invited Mr. Glynn's party to lunch with him on both these days.

We called him the "voiceful Canon" because he read and intoned quite differently to anybody else; even father never slept in the Cathedral when he intoned the Litany. He was only a minor Canon really, but he lived in the Close in a queer little curly house built over a Gothic archway.

He wore very old clothes, and constantly smoked a meerschaum pipe the colour of a brown fritillary. His inseparable companion was a bandy-legged bull-terrier, and we loved them both.

Mother used often to take us to afternoon service at the Cathedral, if we happened to be in town, and the first time Fiametta saw the voiceful Canon, the lesson for the day

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happened to be the twenty-seventh chapter of Genesis.

Service was as usual in the choir, and I remember the little thrill of excited expectation with which we noted the ugly wooden scaffoldings and rows of chorus seats in the nave.

When the voiceful Canon began to read, Fiametta sat forward in her seat in the Deanery pew; her big eyes blazed, and she grew pale as she always did when excited.

The story of Jacob's treachery was very vivid, told in that wonderfully musical, grave voice, almost monotonous in its measured periods, till suddenly the "exceeding bitter cry" went echoing up into the traceried roof, "Bless me, even me also, O my father."

There was the sound of a little splash on the wooden bookboard in front of us, and I turned and looked at Fiametta to find that big tears were streaming down her cheeks.

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She took my hand — Fiametta always wanted a hand to hold whether she was glad or sorry — and held it tight, but she did not say anything, she was learning that in England we don't speak in churches.

As mother had to call at the palace we went out through the cloisters, and met the voiceful Canon as he came out of the Chapter room. Fiametta stopped right in his path, looking up at him with tear-washed eyes set in an earnest, flushed little face, and asked gravely, "Don't you think Jacob was a scoundrel?"

He pulled up short and stared at the slender blue-clad figure silhouetted against the grey distance of that symmetrical avenue of "interlaced stone branches." "Don't you?" repeated Fiametta, giving an impatient little pull at his arm.

The swing door at the end of the cloister closed behind mother and Miss Goodlake, who went out under the impression that we were following. "He behaved abomina-

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bly," said the Canon with a heartiness that left us in no doubt as to his sentiments.

"You made me cry," said Fiametta. "I felt almost as sorry as I felt when Rip Van Winkle's little daughter did not know him — after all those years. I cried so then, my Daddie nearly had to take me out of the theatre."

"Was it Jefferson?" asked the Canon eagerly.

"It was Rip Van Winkle. There 's only one."

"Yes, there 's only one," said the Canon softly.

There are others now, they tell me, but to those who have seen *him*, as to Fiametta, "there 's only one."

The voiceful Canon had taken Fiametta's hand, and we all three walked slowly through the cloister together.

"Who is she, Janey?" he asked. "Who has paid me this wonderful compliment?"

"I 'm Fiametta," that maiden hastened to

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reply, "and I'm coming to the festival next week, and so are Janey and Miss Goodlake — to the 'Elijah' *and* the 'Messiah'!"

"Then you must all three come to lunch with me, and there you'll see at close quarters some of the celebrated folks you've just been listening to. Won't that be fun?"

While Fiametta was expressing her satisfaction at this arrangement together with a pious hope that he would have *meringues* for lunch, mother and Miss Goodlake came back to look for us.

The voiceful Canon repeated his invitation to mother, and it was accepted.

"I'm glad you hate Jacob," Fiametta called out, as we parted from the Canon in Palace Yard, "I do."

During festival week everybody in the Close keeps open house, so that when in the interval of the "Elijah" we arrived at the voiceful Canon's, it seemed somewhat

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doubtful whether we should ever get in at all, far less get anything to eat. Once inside, we were so tightly wedged in the crowd filling his tiny elbow-shaped hall, that we couldn't so much as catch a glimpse of our host, and being extremely hungry, we envied certain militia officers who were lunching on the staircase with the Canon's pretty nieces. Presently, however, he saw us, and by dint of much pushing and squeezing, with laughing requests from the Canon that folks would make way for his "distinguished visitors," we got into the dining-room, where places had been kept for us at a table with three of the wonderful people who "had sung by themselves" that very morning.

The room was positively crammed, but for me the company only held the two ladies and the stout jolly man who had just been filling the Cathedral nave with music — and such music! One lady was tall, dark, and grave, as befitted the owner

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of the deepest contralto voice in the profession. But the other! How shall I describe that other? Hungry as I was, I could hardly eat any lunch for the wonder of watching her. From her French name to her soft American accent, she was a succession of contradictions, an incarnation of paradox. A little crowd of men, mostly clerics (but they also are human), stood behind her chair, and she tilted her face back to them from time to time, and smiling, said something that was invariably greeted with delighted laughter. A perfumed rustle accompanied her every movement — and she was never still. I am not even sure if she was pretty; her face was square and pale, framed in masses of dark, heavy hair drawn back from her forehead in a fashion then unusual; her mouth was big, red-lipped, and mobile, and when she laughed she showed two even rows of small white teeth. For the rest, she was little and plump; such a figure in an or-

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dinary woman would be stigmatised as "dumpy," but she left you no time for critical definition, she was so full of surprises.

"Who is that picturesque child?" she asked, as we came into the room and sat down opposite to her.

"Do you mean me or Janey?" Fiametta answered in a tone of polite interest, as she shook out her table napkin.

Madame Laferre laughed, but ignoring the child herself, again demanded, "Who is she?"

Somebody behind her murmured something, and she gave a little start, exclaiming, "Not Geoffrey Glynn's daughter?"

"He's my Daddie, anyhow," said Fiametta, somewhat offended that she was not allowed to establish her own identity. "Do you know him?"

The lady leant across the table and looked hard at Fiametta as she answered in queer little disjointed phrases, "Yes — no — at least — I did once, a little, — you

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are not like him, nor are you like — " She stopped.

" I 'm like Mr. Rossetti's Blessed Damozel, that 's who I 'm like, he says so himself; Daddie, I mean. Now *you* are like la Giaconda; do you think you 're like la Giaconda ? "

Madame Laferre put both her elbows on the table and rested her chin in her hands, still staring at Fiametta as she answered slowly in her musical drawl, " Now that is curious; I 've been told that before, but never by a child."

" Perhaps you don't see many children," Fiametta suggested. " I never did till I came here, but I like them, specially Janey, she 's my dearest friend," and Fiametta turned and smiled encouragingly at me. As the gaze of the entire company followed hers, I wished that the earth might open and swallow me up, but evidently they found me of but secondary interest, for in another moment my cheeks were permitted

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to cool themselves in humble obscurity once more.

Madame Laferre asked Fiametta so many questions, and seemed so interested in her replies, that the group of worshippers behind her chair got no more backward glances, and long before we had finished our grapes it was time to go back to the Cathedral.

As we thronged out into the Close I got separated for a few minutes from Fiametta and Miss Goodlake, and drifted into a group consisting of Madame Laferre and her henchmen.

"At the Court, you say? Squire Staniland's — about three miles out?" were the questions I heard her ask of one of them, and I wondered if she intended coming to call on mother.

It was a strange week, that festival week; I seemed to move in a sort of dream in which vaulted roofs echoed to a great concourse of sweet sounds; gaily dressed

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crowds, no lessons, and hasty meals in which salmon and pineapple bulked largely, were all mixed together in a bewildering jumble, while against this background of motley experience the blue-clad figure of Fiametta stands out with quaint distinction.

Two days elapsed between the performance of the "Elijah" and that of the "Messiah," so we had time for plenty of discussion anent the one experience before entering on the next. I seem to have spent those two days entirely with Fiametta; I can't remember what became of the boys, but it is not unlikely that our somewhat superior attitude of "nearly grown-up young ladies," taking part in a social function of importance, caused them to shun our society. At all events they were not in the least envious of our privileges, as they regarded with cold distrust any pursuit that took one into church for the greater part of a day.

We did not see Madame Laferre next time we went to lunch with the voiceful

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Canon on the following Friday, but during the drive home mother told us that she had met her at the Deanery.

"Did you like her?" asked Fiametta eagerly. "Don't you think she's very pretty?"

Mother shook her head smilingly. "No, I don't think she is pretty. I think she's a great artist who sings very beautifully, but beyond that I don't think I want to know very much about her. She does not strike me as a sincere person."

There was an Edgeworthian ring about this remark that made me feel very kindly disposed towards Madame Laferre. "Do you mean that she is untruthful, mother?" I asked resentfully.

"No, no, my dear Janey, how you do jump at conclusions; I only meant that her way of expressing herself strikes me as somewhat exaggerated, but that is only my opinion, other people may think quite differently."

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"I think she is quite beautiful and delightful and wonderful," cried Fiametta. "Do ask her to come here! do, dear Mrs. Staniland!"

"I could n't do that, dear," said mother decidedly. "Besides, I expect she leaves Garchester to-day. To-morrow is the last day of the festival and they are going to give Beethoven's 'Missa Solennis.' She is not singing in that, so I expect she will go away at once."

"I should like to have seen her again!" and Fiametta sighed wistfully.

I, too, would have liked to see her again, but although I instinctively resented mother's criticism as savouring of Miss Edgeworth, at the back of my brain I had an uneasy suspicion that it was just; and almost unconsciously I began comparing her with mother who was, of all things, "a sincere person."

That time certainly ranks as an epoch in a child's mind when first it regards its

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mother as an individual, ceasing for the moment to take her for granted with that happy trustfulness which can conceive of nothing different. We were all very silent during the rest of the drive home, and I remember that, for the first time in my mental history, such a contingency as that I might have had a different sort of mother presented itself as possible — and — how unpleasant!

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XX

BLACK MAGIC

And so we lost her.

ROBERT BROWNING

"JANEY, I can't sleep. The music goes over and over in my head — that sheep piece, where you hear them pattering. Can I come into your bed for a little and talk?"

By this time I had got used to Fiametta's occasional sleeplessness, to me a thing unknown, so I made room for her in my bed — we were a very tight fit — and took one of her hot little hands in mine.

"Janey, that music has made me want my Daddie so badly — I wish he was at home again. I've never wanted him before without being able to get him, and it aches me. I have n't wanted him so badly for

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a long time; and the moon's gone in, and there are no stars; it's such a dark, sad night; even the leaves seem shivering and sobbing."

"I expect it's going to thunder," I remarked prosaically. I was very sleepy and could arouse no pity for the leaves, sobbed they never so.

"Janey! Don't go to sleep, Janey! It's so lonely to be awake by one's self. Once when I was a very little girl in London with my Daddie, I could n't sleep; nurse had gone down to the kitchen, so I climbed out of my cot and went downstairs, sit-first, bumpetty-bump on every step, and when I got into the hall I heard a great laughing and talking in the dining-room, so I went to the door but it was shut, and I was so little I could n't turn the handle. But they heard me fumbling and Daddie came himself to open the door, and picked me up and carried me in, and it was so light. There were a lot of gentlemen sitting

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at dessert, and I sat on Daddie's knee all in the nice smell of smoke; and one of them (he had long hair, such rumply hair! and sometimes talked so loud) came and knelt by Daddie's chair and took hold of my bare foot and kissed it, and he looked so solemn just as though he were saying his prayers. He was a poet, Janey, too, though not so nice as Daddie, and then they put me on the table and 'toasted' me; you know what that means? and then they all went away because Daddie wanted to put me to bed all himself. Oh, I do wish he would come home!"

"He 'll be home before very long," I remarked consolingly, "and then you 'll be so happy you won't know what to do."

"I know what I 'll do then," sighed Fiametta; "it 's what I 'm to do now that troubles me."

"Go to sleep," I suggested.

Fiametta sighed again and slowly got out of my bed. "I 'll try, Janey," she

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said with unexpected meekness; "you 're always so uninteresting at night."

Fiametta agreed with the poet who declared that "night for sleep was never made." From my point of view it was made wholly and solely for that purpose.

Father and mother had gone for the whole day to Garchester, it was the last day of the festival. We did desultory lessons with Miss Goodlake in the morning, lessons which finished for the day at twelve; after lunch we were free to do what we liked till tea-time. Paul and Harry went to play cricket in the vicarage field; they invited us to come and watch them, but we preferred to "play at ladies" under the larches near the drive gate, where there were delightful suites of rooms formed by overhanging branches, and a pleasant shade singularly suited to the constitutions of our dolls. Miss Goodlake retired to write letters, and we arranged our respective households

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and exchanged hospitality in peaceful seclusion.

We played very happily for an hour or so, till the stillness was broken by the crunching of wheels on the road outside. The wheels stopped a little way from the gate, there was a sound of footsteps, and a young woman pushed the gate open and stood still as if to listen. She reminded me a little of Eliza, our parlour-maid, wearing the same sort of plain black dress with neat collar and cuffs, and a little black bonnet tied under the chin with strings; but the expression of her thin, sallow face was quite other than Eliza's, so alert was it; very little would escape the scrutiny of that pair of bright, dark eyes, and as if in answer to their compelling gaze, Fiametta stepped out from our hiding-place to see who had arrived.

The bright eyes closed with a snap and the stranger's aspect changed from that of a vigilant scout in unknown territory to the expressionless calm of a well-trained servant,

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as she asked respectfully, "Are you Miss Glynn, Miss?"

"Yes, I'm Fiametta; do you want to see me?" and the little blue figure pushed through the prickly barberry bushes bordering the drive to join her questioner. I followed, full of curiosity as to this mysterious visitor.

"Madame Laferre would like to speak to you for a few minutes if you would come, Miss. She's in a carriage just outside and thought perhaps you would come for a little drive with her."

"Come along, Janey!" cried Fiametta joyfully, "the beautiful singing lady is here; it's like something that might have happened to Schemselnihar!"

"What fun!" I exclaimed rapturously, preparing instantly to join Fiametta in this entrancing expedition. But my transports were moderated only too quickly as the maid said quietly, "Madame Laferre only asked for Miss Glynn, Miss. I don't think there

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would be room for three, it's a very little 'broom.'"

I was dreadfully mortified, but we are all proud, so without a word I dragged my hand out of Fiametta's and plunged into the bushes again.

"Do you mind, Janey?" she called after me. "You see she once knew my Daddie."

"Of course not," I called back, wrestling with a lump in my throat that would make my voice sound hoarse and strange. Fiametta threw me a hasty kiss and tripped away in company with the stranger, and in another minute I heard the sound of departing wheels.

That it was shocking, degraded, positively "oikish" as the boys would say, to want to go anywhere where people did not want me, I was painfully aware. All the same I envied Fiametta, and thought her very unkind in consenting to go without me. Sitting down on the dry gritty ground (the ground under larches is always hard

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and gritty) with my back against a tree, I shut my eyes tight that I might not disgrace myself by crying, and presently I must have fallen asleep, for the next thing I remember was the sound of wheels and of horses' hoofs in the drive itself, and I scrambled to my feet just in time to catch a fleeting glimpse of Dutton as he turned his horses smartly round the bend where the shrubbery ended. Dutton would not have driven slowly up to the house for the world.

"It must be tea-time then," I reflected, "or father and mother would not be home. Fiametta must have found me asleep and gone back to the house." She had not taken her dolls, though; models of deportment, all the dolls were still seated at the tea-party Madame Laferre's maid had interrupted.

I gathered them up in my arms, and yawning noisily with no one to rebuke me strolled slowly up to the house. I felt unaccountably tired and slack, it was such

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a hot afternoon, grey and still and breathless. I did n't feel half awake even when I reached the schoolroom, where Miss Goodlake stood at the table infusing the tea.

"Where *have* you been, Janey?" she asked crossly. "Did n't you hear the bell? It rang twenty minutes ago, — and where 's Fiametta?"

"Is n't she here?" I asked wearily as I laid the great bundle of dolls down on the sofa. "I suppose she 's in the house somewhere."

I had no intention of exciting myself this time. "Perhaps she 's in the drawing-room with mother," I continued; "they 're back."

"Go and see, and tell her to come to tea at once. Really this has been the most irregular week. You are all quite disorganised." And Miss Goodlake shut the tea-pot lid with an angry little slap. I noticed creases in her cheeks which showed that she too had been asleep.

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Father and mother were having tea quite alone for a wonder. I had gone quietly round to the open French window to see if Fiametta was there, that I might not disturb them if she were not. Mother was leaning back in her chair looking very tired; she had had a hard week. Father saw me, however, and called me in with Miss Goodlake's question, "Where 's Fiametta?"

"I suppose she has n't come back from her drive yet, father," I answered.

"What drive?" asked father, who always knew to a minute what horses went out.

"Madame Laferre came and fetched her for a drive just after lunch."

Mother laid down her cup and sat forward in her chair staring at me in the utmost astonishment as she repeated incredulously, "Madame Laferre? And Miss Goodlake let her go?"

"Oh, we never asked Miss Goodlake, there was n't time."

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"Explain what you mean, Janey, I don't understand. Have you been out of the grounds?"

"Oh, no, mother! Madame Laferre sent her maid. We were playing under the larches near the drive gate, where we often play at houses, and the maid came and asked Fiametta to go for a drive, and so she went."

"With whom?" mother asked irritably. "And you let her go alone without asking Miss Goodlake or anything?"

"I was n't asked to go. The maid specially said 'only Miss Glynn.'"

"But what did Madame Laferre say? What explanation did she give of this most extraordinary proceeding? and why did n't you go at once to Miss Goodlake to tell her where Fiametta had gone?"

As mother showered her questions upon me I began to feel that somehow I had behaved very badly. "I did n't see Madame Laferre at all," I said apologetically.

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"They did n't want me, so I never went out of the drive. Then I fell asleep till just as you came home, the carriage woke me, — I was so disappointed."

"Then you don't even know if it *was* Madame Laferre!" mother cried in tones that Fiametta herself would have called "essasperated."

Such a question as this had never occurred to me. The vast possibilities it involved fairly took my breath away, and I sat down helplessly on the nearest chair.

Mother stared at me in indignant silence for a full minute till father said quietly, "Before we excite ourselves further it would be well to find out whether Fiametta has not already returned. If she went out just after lunch she has been gone some three hours, and even if Madame Laferre took her into Garchester to tea after their drive she ought to be back by now." Father rang the bell, and mother said shortly, "Send Miss Goodlake to me, and wait in

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the schoolroom yourself till I send for you; have your tea."

I had n't much desire for tea all alone in the schoolroom. Every one seemed so cross and perturbed. Miss Goodlake did not come back, Lucy and nurse had gone to tea with Mrs. Dutton, the boys were still at the vicarage. I had never had tea alone in all my life before, and in its commonplace way it seemed a sort of foreshadowing of that feeling of personal responsibility which was to come upon me for the first time in my life. Already I felt uncomfortably certain that mother blamed me for letting Fiametta go without first asking leave from Miss Goodlake; and I could n't explain to mother that the very fact that I had wanted so much to go, too, had effectually prevented my suggesting any difficulties as to her enjoying a pleasure I so longed to share with her.

Presently as I sat in the deep window seat watching the approach, I saw father

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drive away in the high dog-cart, and a moment afterwards mother came into the room and shut the door carefully behind her.

"We are very puzzled, Janey," she said gently; "we have questioned all the servants and there is no doubt that Fiametta has not come back. It may be, of course, that Madame Laferre is only thoughtless, and has kept the child such a long time without reflecting how anxious we should be. Father has gone to Garchester to the hotel where she was staying, and will probably bring Fiametta back with him, in which case I shall be most thankful, but —"

As mother paused and I looked up into her troubled eyes, a nameless fear seemed to lay cold hands about my heart. "It was such a curious thing to do," she went on, "to come like that to fetch a child for a drive, a child, too, that she had seen only once, who was staying with people she did n't know."

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"She seemed to like her very much, though," I suggested timidly, "and I heard her ask Canon Lygon where she was staying, that day we had lunch with him in the Close, the 'Elijah' day."

"Well, we can do nothing now till your father comes back, and I pray that he may bring that dear child with him," and mother kissed me and went away, leaving me to the far from pleasant companionship of my own thoughts.

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XXI

A CUL-DE-SAC

When the liquor 's out, why clink the cannikin?
ROBERT BROWNING

"WHERE 's Fiametta?" cried the boys as they came tumbling over each other into the schoolroom half an hour later. "And what are you boxed up in here for? It 's not raining."

"Where 's Fiametta?" That question was destined to be burned into my brain before the day was out. I turned upon the boys, exclaiming passionately, "I don't know, we none of us know; she 's lost really this time, and father 's gone to look for her in Garchester."

"Were you cross to her, Janey?" asked Paul, remembering the cause of our former scare.

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"Here *is* father!" cried Harry from the window where he was standing. I rushed to join him just in time to see father drive up to the hall door with the mare "all of a lather."

There was no one with him but Greenwood, the groom.

The drawing-room bell pealed loudly, and almost directly Eliza put her head in at the schoolroom door with a message to the effect that "Miss Janey was to go down immediately." The boys were perfectly silent; that 's one blessed thing about boys, they never say aggravating things when you 're in trouble. So slowly did I go downstairs that I remember wondering whether it could be my own legs that carried me.

Father was standing on the hearth rug looking odd and Sundayish in the black coat he never wore except at church, which he had not had time to change. "Are you quite sure, Janey," he said, "that the maid,

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if she was a maid, said it was *Madame Laferre* who wanted to see Fiametta?"

"Oh, yes! and we were so pleased, because we both wanted dreadfully to see her again."

"But you did n't see her? — Madame Laferre, I mean."

"No, father, because the maid said she only wanted to see 'Miss Glynn.'"

"Well it 's an exceedingly odd thing, Janey, but I've been to the 'Bell' where she was staying, and they tell me that she left with her maid for London this morning by the eleven forty. I asked to see some of the other singing people who were staying there, and they told me the same thing."

"But, father, if it was n't Madame Laferre who could it be, and why should she take away Fiametta?"

"For the matter of that," said father slowly, "why should Madame Laferre take her away?"

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"Do you think she has *stolen* her?" I cried after a horror-struck pause.

"Nonsense!" cried father hastily, "people don't do that sort of thing out of fairy tales."

Mother said nothing, but she went and stood beside father on the hearth rug and slipped her hand into his, and it struck me with some surprise that even mother seemed to need help sometimes.

"If that woman does n't bring her back in an hour," said father after another long silence, "I must go into Garchester and put the police on her track, and I 'll telegraph to Slater's people. It 's the most inexplicable thing I ever came across."

By lunch-time on Sunday we had faced the dreadful fact that whoever had come for Fiametta had evidently no intention of communicating with us or of allowing her to do so.

That it was Madame Laferre who had

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taken her away, I had no sort of doubt, even though I had only the maid's message and my fancied recognition of her voice to go upon.

No one had seen Madame Laferre since she drove to the station on the previous morning, but then nearly all our friends had been shut up in the Cathedral on the previous afternoon, and all our inquiries and those of the police were fruitless. We could find no smallest trace either of her or of our blue maiden.

By Monday afternoon we learned that Madame Laferre was not, and had not been for the last ten days, at her London address. Moreover, that she had, while at Garchester on the previous Friday evening, announced in a letter to her housekeeper her intention of taking a week's holiday in the country, that she did not want to be troubled by any business, and therefore gave no address to which letters might be forwarded.

It seemed that Madame Laferre and Fia-

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metta had both vanished into space. Miss Goodlake went about with red eyes, and would not bear me out of her sight, which was most trying. The boys were very solemn and very kind to me, because they felt, as I did, that somehow I was to blame. Father, we hardly ever saw; he was in Garchester all day, and Greenwood spent all his time between the Court and the post-office waiting for or despatching telegrams.

It was just as though a blue campanula, chief ornament of some little garden bed, had been ruthlessly rooted up during the night, leaving a great gaping wound in place of its gracious presence.

We missed her at every turn; the deep window seat in the schoolroom looked forlorn and untenanted with no gay blue figure kneeling there, thrusting a sunny head out among the roses. She was often irritating and patronising, but she was such good company! She "made things hum" as did no other of our contemporaries, and

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in the midst of all our sorrow and perplexity, we felt an awe-struck admiration for any little girl who could disappear entirely in so unusual and exciting a fashion.

"It could only have happened to Fee," said Paul wistfully. "I should n't wonder if she does grow into a princess after all — she 's so 'strordinary."

The Giant came out on Monday morning to see mother. They were shut up together for a long time, and when he left mother looked more worried and distressed than before. She called me into the morning-room where she was sitting in her big revolving chair in front of her writing-table, and took me on her knee, saying, "I have got news Janey, not of Fiametta, but such news as convinces me that you were perfectly right, that it *is* Madame Laferre who has taken her, that it has been done deliberately, and is the result of a sudden caprice. I have telegraphed to Mr. Glynn to return at once."

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While mother was speaking my eyes wandered almost unconsciously to the telegraph form lying open on her blotting-pad. In pencil, in mother's bold legible handwriting, were these words: "Your wife has stolen Fiametta; come at once."

Utterly bewildered I turned to look at mother. She was very pale, and I felt her arms tremble as they clasped me.

"Mother!" I said, in a breathless sort of whisper, "I've read that telegram! What does it mean?"

To my immense surprise and consternation, mother burst into tears and hid her face on my shoulder. "I never meant you to see it, Janey," she sobbed. "But now that you have seen it, I must explain. You are a good child, an honest child, and can be trusted."

I was terribly distressed. "Don't tell me, mother dear," I cried, "if it hurts you; and oh, don't cry any more, it's so dreadful!"

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Mother held me tight for a minute or two, then she gave herself a little shake and sat up straight and strong as usual, saying, "Listen, Janey! there are a great many sad things in the world that you happily have never even dreamt of, and I hoped that it might be years before you should ever know of anything so wretched as what I 'm going to tell you. Not all wives love their husbands, Janey, nor all mothers their children. Fiametta's mother is not dead, but she did n't love either her husband or her child enough to stay with them, and when Fiametta was a little baby only a few months old, she left them. When we first knew Mr. Glynn he was in great trouble with a baby daughter and no mother to look after her. I did n't even know what his wife was doing or under what name she went. He never spoke of her, and other people only told me that she had gone back to America and was singing there. She has never seen Fiametta from the

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time she left her, till the other day in Garchester. She appears to be a person who acts wholly upon impulse, who will get what she wants no matter who may be made to suffer in the process. I suppose she was attracted by the child, and knowing that she certainly could get her by no sort of fair means, she has adopted this way, this cruel way, of getting her wish gratified. She will tire of her as she tires of everybody, — but what is happening to that poor little girl in the meantime? And how, how can we face her father?"

Mother began to cry again, and I, too bewildered and amazed to find any words of comfort, sat perfectly still and silent.

Just then father came in. Mother looked up and smiled even through her tears, he looked so comically hot and cross and worried, more worried, even, than when one of the thorough-bred foals ran into its mother and broke its neck. There he stood, racking his brains for something comforting to

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say, and nothing came. Mother spoke first. "She saw the telegram, Henry, and I've told her. She is a loyal child and we can trust her."

Father stuck his hands deep in his pockets as he leant against the mantelpiece, frowning. "It's a most unpleasant business, — confoundedly unpleasant; but one part of the mystery is solved, and I only hope the little blue maid will worry the life out of Madame What's-her-name. It's only a question of time, but she's certainly hidden her very successfully. I do wish we could get hold of the child, though, before Glynn comes back, poor chap!"

"He can't be here before Wednesday night, at soonest," said mother; "surely we can do a great deal before that."

My heart was very heavy when I left the morning-room. In all my life before I had never known of anything that the whole world might not have known so far as its importance went. But what weighed

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most heavily upon me was the recollection of Mr. Glynn's voice as he said, "She is all I have, Janey." And I, who had vowed in my heart to be a "gentleman" to Fiametta — what could I say? Would a gentleman have let her get lost? Anyway, if such a misfortune happened he would feel bound to find her again, and there flashed into my mind the search-light of certainty, — it was just *that* I had to do. To find Fiametta! I, and no one else! But how?

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XXII

JANEY'S DREAM

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best whether winning or losing it,
If you choose to play! — is my principle.

ROBERT BROWNING

BY Tuesday night we were no "forrader"; another restless, distressful day had passed, leaving mother hollow-eyed and pale with anxiety, which was in no way lessened by a telegram from Mr. Glynn, briefly stating that he would be with us the following evening.

That telegram broke me down completely. I felt that unless we found Fiametta before he arrived I could not dare to meet him, and would need to run away myself for very shame. Long after I went to bed, I lay awake picturing his face as it would be when he came back and there was

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no little blue maid to run and fling herself into his arms. To and fro I tossed from side to side, while the eternal "where's Fiametta?" beat into my brain with wearisome persistence. At last, completely worn out, I fell into a troubled sleep which finally resolved itself into a singularly vivid dream.

I found myself, how, I neither knew nor cared, walking along a dusty highroad on the hills, in a part of the country quite unfamiliar to me. Presently, however, the road dipped, and in front of me in the valley lay a little town where I had only been twice in my life.

It was rather a remarkable little town, for it possessed two rivers and a beautiful abbey church. It was, moreover, exceedingly quaint and picturesque, with wide streets and tall, timbered houses from whose open doors one got delightful glimpses of gay gardens sloping to the river.

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But another interest was attached to this town; a certain very famous novel had been written about it, and there was one house, now an inn, which claimed distinction solely by reason that it was mainly the scene of the novel in question. Father had twice taken us all to tea in the garden of this same inn, which lay on the banks of the Avon, and was further remarkable by reason of a wonderful yew hedge, thus described by the writer of the novel: "It was about fifteen feet high and as many thick. Century after century of growth, with careful clipping and training, had compacted it into a massive green barrier, as close and impervious as a wall."

Now in my dream the whole town lay before me clear and flat like a map. Opposite the abbey church, that garden with its great yew hedge and trim bowling green, was especially distinct. One thing struck me as strange, there were no people moving in the streets. "It must be very early in

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the morning," I thought to myself, as I stood staring down at the quaint, absolutely quiet little town. A shuddering sort of fear suddenly seized me; I was afraid to go on, neither had I the courage to turn and go back. Presently I saw a figure moving in the shadow of the great yew hedge. At first it was very tiny, a mere speck in the distance, but gradually my eyes seemed to get stronger, or the figure grew, and now I saw that the figure was that of a little girl. A moment more and I caught my breath in a passion of expectation, for the little girl was dressed in blue!

I gazed and gazed, as with every laboured breath I drew the figure grew clearer, and I knew that I had found Fiametta! I tried to call to her but my voice was dumb in my throat. I strove to go to her but my limbs refused to bear me, and the agony of this inertia was so dreadful that I awoke, shuddering and sobbing, to find that it was day, and the kindly sun was making rain-

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bows on the ceiling through the slats of the blind.

Mere words can in no way convey the poignant vividness of my dream. Even now, as I sat up in bed fighting with my sobs, in the dear, familiar room, the terrible helplessness of the moment in which I saw Fiametta and could not go to her oppressed me. I got out of bed, pulled up the blind, and curled myself up in the window seat to find comfort in the garden, so green and gracious and serene in the clear morning light. Then remembrance came to me that this was the day on which Mr. Glynn was to come, and Fiametta was — where? Instantly, and quite unconsciously, I answered aloud, "In Abel Fletcher's garden!"

The sound of my own voice startled me, and I leapt to my feet, for now I understood what my dream meant. Fiametta was there. There! within a dozen miles of us, and I must go to her now, at once!

I dragged on my stockings and dressed

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in feverish haste. I omitted my bath and even forgot to wash my face. Choosing my stoutest boots, I laced them up tightly and tied them in many knots, for a long walk lay before me, and I had heard that one could walk best and farthest in stout boots.

The stable clock struck seven. It was not so very early then, but the servants would not be in any way surprised to see me go out into the garden. The boys were not up yet, neither was Miss Goodlake; there was no one to stop me. I turned back my bed as I had been taught to do. The maids would not come in to do my room till about nine o'clock, and by that time I should be far away. Then I thought of mother: she must not be frightened any more, but neither must she know my plan and stop me, as I knew she would. So I wrote a little note and put it under my pillow where I knew the maids would find it when they came to make my bed. "Dear

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Mother," I said, "don't be frightened. I have gone to find Fiametta. Nobody but me can do it, and I shall do it. Your loving Janey."

Then I went down the back stairs as softly as my thick boots would allow, and out into the glorious summer morning to seek such fortune as the Fates might hold.

First of all I walked into Garchester by the fields. Beyond that I did n't know my way, but once there I felt sure some one would direct me. I began to feel dreadfully hungry as I crossed the last bridge and turned up the steep street where the chaff is always flying from the mills. I had forgotten all about breakfast, and in my excitement had even omitted to take the biscuits Miss Goodlake always put for us in case we went out early, and I had no money. But it was of no use to think about trifles like that, so I began to run to keep my courage, and turning a corner

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at the top of the hill, charged clumsily into a tall gentleman who was strolling leisurely along the almost deserted street.

"Good gracious, Janey! what on earth are you doing here at this hour?" cried the Giant (he had got up early to go and look in the park for Privet Hawk moth caterpillars), catching me forcibly by the arms, as I tried to rush past him.

"Don't keep me! Don't stop me!" I cried breathlessly. "I know where she is, and I 'm going to find her."

The Giant's strong hands held me like a vice, and I could not move.

"Tell me about it, Janey," he said, "and I promise you on my honour I won't hinder you; perhaps I may be able to help you."

I looked up into his face, and I trusted him. I think I have said before that he was an understanding person, and certainly he showed himself to be such that morning. I told him all about my dream, and that

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if I could n't go and look in Abel Fletcher's garden I should assuredly die. I reminded him that he had promised on his honour not to hinder me, and there was no time to be lost. All this in disjointed sentences broken by tears and sobs, as we stood on the pavement in the empty street.

The Giant let go my arms and took my hand; he also bestowed his own handkerchief upon me. I had forgotten mine, and his was so large, and clean, and comforting. He asked me many questions, even eliciting the fact that I had had no breakfast, then he said, "Come along, Janey! We 'll go and order a dog-cart at the Bell, and have some breakfast while they 're putting the horse in. I 'll drive you over and you shall satisfy yourself whether she is there or not. Come along!"

How good that breakfast was in the clean, dark coffee-room alone with the Giant, waited on by subservient waiters — there was no one else down, so we had the

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undivided attention of three — then heigh! for boot and horse! and the Giant lifted me into a high dog-cart with a tall, raw-boned, raking grey between the shafts.

"I've sent a wire to the Court to say you're with me," said the Giant, as we whirled out of the town. "We can't have any more mysterious disappearances."

During the long drive we were very silent, and my certainty that I should find Fiametta became less sure. Suppose my dream should mean nothing after all! What would the Giant think of me? What would they think of me at home?

Then Paul's favourite proverb, always quoted when he wanted to do something contrary to rule, came into my mind to cheer me: "Nothing venture, nothing have!" Besides, I felt it in my bones that she was there.

When we reached the top of the hill where I had stood in my dream, I found that in reality I could not see Abel Fletcher's

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garden at all, only the Abbey and a confused indistinct mass of buildings quite unlike the clear plan-like vision of the night.

"I won't put up at that inn," said the Giant, as we drove into the little town, "lest she is there; we 'll put up at the Swan for the gee must have a bit of a rest, whether or no."

The Swan proved to be the very next. "Now, Janey, for your garden," said the Giant as he lifted me down.

My knees "were as the knees of dolls," my legs shook under me.

"Don't come in at first," I whispered nervously, as we reached the gabled timbered house, whence swung a sign to the effect that here had dwelt the hero of that famous novel; "come round to the back. There 's a road runs on the other side of the yew hedge."

"Let 's go and listen," said the Giant, smiling indulgently, and came.

It was not *his* way of doing things, I

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knew that, but this was my affair entirely, and he let me have my way. I found out afterwards that he had feared for my reason and thought it better to give in, in every respect, to calm me.

"Now we must wait and listen," I said, as we arrived in a narrow lane with the yew hedge on one side and the river on the other.

It was not yet ten o'clock, but there was bustle and brightness in the little town. No one passed our way though, for the lane was unfrequented, and led to nowhere in particular.

For full five minutes the Giant and I stood listening. At first I could hear nothing but the wild thumping of my own heart, then gradually other sounds grew detached and distinct. The distant cheerful bustle of the town, the lap of the water against the banks, and above all these others, a nearer sound, that of a little song.

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The Giant grasped my hand so hard that I nearly cried out.

We stood listening with a strained attention that was almost pain.

Some one on the other side of the hedge was singing; singing very softly in a crooning, sad little voice. And the song was the Basque song "ALZA."

"Car Ninetta la belle, Ninetta l'infidèle,
Avait, et pour toujours, oublié ses amours."

The Giant waited until the end of the verse, then he said softly, "By Jove, Janey, I believe you 're a witch!"

I sat down suddenly under the hedge and began to cry feebly, for now I knew that our journey had not been in vain.

"Now, Janey," said the Giant, still in the very smallest of whispers, "stay just where you are, watch and listen! and the very moment Fiametta comes out to you, run, both of you, to the Swan and order the dog-cart. *We 're* going to steal her this time."

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The little song on the other side of the hedge ceased suddenly, I heard a scamper of light feet, then all was still and I sat waiting, it seemed for hours.

No one passed either up or down the lane for a long time; at last I saw a little girl in a dirty white dress come round the corner nearest the highroad. She didn't interest me particularly, for just then there was only one little girl in the world for me, and she was always dressed in blue. But all the same when this little girl cried out, and ran towards me I saw that in spite of the dirty white frock it was Fiametta!

We rushed together, and she dragged me along, whispering under her breath, "Quick, Janey! Quick! Take me where he said. They aren't up yet. Quick!"

Hand in hand we ran down the High Street to the Swan, and once there I found the ostler and ordered the dog-cart. He grumbled a good deal and seemed rather displeased, muttering many things to the

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effect that "the mare worn't 'alf rested." But what cared we, standing together under the wide archway leading to the stables, with our arms round each other? We peeped out from time to time to see if the Giant was coming, almost too happy to talk.

"Here he is!" cried Fiametta at last, and sure enough there he was, just as the surly ostler buckled the last strap of the harness, and led the mare up the yard and through the archway into the street.

"You ain't got much mercy on your cattle, sir," he remarked to the Giant as he came hurrying up.

"Needs must when the Devil drives," answered that gentleman. Something changed hands, and the ostler's face was wreathed with smiles.

"I don't think the mare'll be much the worse, neither," he said graciously as we drove off.

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"That was a near thing," exclaimed the Giant, wiping his brow when once we were out into the open on the Garchester road. "Just as I finished the breakfast I had to order to explain my presence in that garden, I heard a voice saying, 'Where's Fiametta?' and I paid my bill and fled."

"*They'll* have to ask that question now for a bit," I remarked with great satisfaction, as I squeezed up against the cause of all this excitement. "It seems a wonderfully easy thing to steal a child! I wonder it is n't done oftener!"

"Heaven forbid!" cried the Giant, and let the reins hang loose on the mare's back as he turned and looked at us.

"I must make haste and get into one of my own frocks before my Daddie comes," said Fiametta, "else he might think I was changed. But I'm not changed inside," she added cheerfully. "They took away my blue frock, but they could n't alter me."

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"No," said the Giant, and his eyes, as he looked down at Fiametta, were very kind; "I don't think they've changed you a bit —inside;" and I heard him add, "Thank God!" low down to himself.

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XXIII

THE TANGLED SKEIN UNRAVELLED

My heart, my heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot,
My heart, my heart is like an apple tree,
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit.

C. ROSSETTI

ALL the way home we chattered hard, that is, Fiametta chattered, and we asked questions. There was so much to hear, and I did n't hear it all then, by any means, but by degrees I have pieced together the story of those four days; for us so fraught with perplexity and pain, for Fiametta so strangely monotonous and dull. So far as possible, I will try to tell what happened in her own words. One thing, however, I speedily discovered that Madame Laferre had given the child no hint of her real relationship towards her. This was to me an immense relief.

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It had seemed so terrible that there could be any divided feeling with regard to one's mother, and after all she *was* Fiametta's mother! Sometimes I could find it in my heart to be sorry for her, for I very well knew that if in the future there ever came to be any question of choice for Fiametta, between her father and the whole world beside, her decision would be unhesitating; he *was* her world.

"Did n't you long to tell me, Janey?" she said long afterwards; "I can't think how you kept anything so exciting to yourself."

But indeed I had no desire to tell her or anybody else. I was thankful to put the whole adventure aside and forget it as quickly as possible. To tell the truth, the situation puzzled me so completely that I felt shy, and as father used to say, "we 're not a talking family."

It seemed that Madame Laferre and her maid lost their train on that Saturday

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morning, and with one of those sudden changes of plan to which she was apparently much given, she decided to go to the pretty river-side town near Garchester, from Saturday to Monday, rather than to Great Marlow as had been her original intention. Finding that there was no train for over three hours, she had lunch at the station, and sent her maid into the town for a carriage, and then drove out to the Court, to see if by chance she could see Fiametta again.

This was accomplished with such absolute ease, that it occurred to her to carry off the child for a few days. The fact that everybody would be so alarmed and indignant added zest to the proceeding, for she had conceived a violent dislike for mother on the single occasion she had met her. Moreover, she really was very much attracted by the child, and to make a long story short, she always did what she liked.

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As they drove into Garchester, she suggested to Fiametta what fun it would be to come with her to a dear little country inn till Monday, and that she would let Mrs. Staniland know she had, as she gaily put it, "carried her off." She had no intention of doing anything of the kind, but that, of course, Fiametta could not divine.

"I should like to come awfully," she said, "but I've no clothes." It was just the sort of adventure to appeal to Fiametta.

"We 'll manage for to-night, and they 'll send some on for to-morrow, it will be all right," said Madame Laferre reassuringly, and so Fiametta thought it was.

By five o'clock, she was having tea with her new friend in Abel Fletcher's garden; I was asleep under the larches, and the very considerable portion of inhabitants of Garchester interested in Madame Laferre were under the impression that she had gone to London.

"I was very happy till bedtime," said

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Fiametta, in relating her adventures. "Then I began to feel lonely. The big hotels were full of people who had come for boating, and Mona Lisa — she told me to call her Mona Lisa because she's so like the picture — was very cross because we could n't get rooms at either of them, and had to stay at the little one, and there was a smell of beer in all the passages. I had dinner with her in the garden; she would n't have it indoors, she said, because the sitting-room they had given her was so hideous; and it began to rain, and we had to rush indoors again, and there was such a fuss and confusion, and she was cross, and the inn people were cross, and Celestine — that's the maid — was crossest of all and said everything was *sacré*.

"It seemed very funny, but Mona Lisa told the people at the inn that her name was Mrs. Smith, and it was all like a play, and I thought it great fun till bedtime came. Then I found that she expected

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me — ME! to sleep in the same bed with Celestine, and I said I would n't. I 've never slept in the same bed with anybody else in my life, and fancy sleeping with a servant! Celestine had come to help me to go to bed, and she brought me a night-dress of Mona Lisa's, very thin and pretty and covered with lace, but it was far too long and big. When I told her that I would not sleep in that bed unless I could have it all for myself, she muttered a lot in French, so I talked French too, very fast, and said it was all *sacré*, and at last she went and fetched Mona Lisa. *She* was nice and said she was dreadfully sorry to ask me to sleep with Celestine, but that they could only give us two rooms, and she really could n't have me in hers or she would n't sleep a wink. So would I do it just for to-night? and she 'd get a room out for Celestine next day.

"I said I 'd sleep on the floor, if they 'd give me a pillow and some clothes, but

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she would n't hear of that, so I had to give in and go to bed, though I hated it. I fell asleep very soon, for I was so tired with all the fuss and arguments, but I woke up in the middle of the night, and it was so stuffy I felt as if I should die, All the rooms in your house smell of air, but this room smelt of a person. A *scented* person! You know the kind of smell, such a tiring smell! and it was Celestine. There she was, fast asleep, and she had shut the window and drawn down the blind, but there was a little new moon shining in, and I got up and pulled up the blind and opened the window, such a little window. Then I felt better, but I wanted you, and I began to wonder if I ought to have come, and I rather hoped Mrs. Staniland would say I was to go back at once. Then I took my pillow out of bed and lay down on the floor and covered myself with my frock and slept till morning. When I woke I was dreadfully hot, for the window

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was shut again, and Celestine had put a thick shawl over me.

"That was a horrid Sunday. Mona Lisa did not come down to breakfast. I had it with Celestine, who was very sulky because I had opened the window; she said it gave her 'neuralgia in the nostril'!

"When Mona Lisa did come down, she was cross because we could n't hire a boat and go on the river. They don't let them out on Sundays. Lots of other people went on the river, but they had their own boats.

"All that day I had to stop in the garden, nobody played with me, and I had nothing to read. I might have played by myself and pretended things, but that horrid Celestine sat near me all the time, when Mona Lisa was n't there. She came sometimes and sat and talked and asked a great many questions, but when I wanted her to sing, she said, 'Hush!' and that no one at the inn must know who she was,

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and it was all very mysterious and romantic. I played I was a refugee in disguise. She said my clothes had n't come because there was no Sunday post, then I wanted to go back and get them and see you all, but she said there were no Sunday trains.

"In the evening it rained, so we sat in the ugly sitting-room that smelt of beer, and I got surer and surer that I ought not to have come, and Daddie would n't like it.

"She did n't get a room out for Celestine because it was Sunday; you can't do anything in that place on Sunday, it 's far worse than here, and I had to sleep with her again, and I hated it so, for she would shut the window because of her neuralgia in the nostril.

"My clothes did n't come on Monday, and Mona Lisa said it was very careless of you all not to send them, but she 'd get me some in the town. So she did, and took away my blue dress and gave

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me this. I heard her say to Celestine, 'It's not so picturesque, but it's less conspicuous,' and I got frightened, for I thought perhaps she would enchant me. I'd never worn any but blue dresses before. You know she *is* wonderful, you feel you must do what she says if she smiles at you and asks you nicely; there is a sort of magicness about her.

"We went on the river a lot that day and it was so nice, for Celestine was not there, only Mona Lisa and me and a nice man who rowed us. He was kind and let me try to row, but it ached my back, so I did n't do it long.

"All the same I wanted to go back to you, and said so. But she said not yet, and begged me to stay with her a little longer, because she was so lonely. So I did, but I was getting miserabler and miserabler. The toothbrush she bought me was so big, and the bath so little, and Celestine is crosser than nurse, and does n't make

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you feel half so comfy in your clothes. Last night I woke up and heard Mona Lisa talking to Celestine; the candle in our room was lit, and they were both there.

"'We 'll go on to Great Marlow to-morrow,' she said, 'I cannot stand another day here. I shall keep the young lady with me till the end of the week, then they may have her back as I wish to go abroad.'

"'Were the friends of the *demoiselle* entirely willing that she come?' Celestine asked. 'It is odd that they send not her clothing.'

"I knew it was mean to listen and not tell them that I was awake, but it suddenly came over me, all hot and dreadful, that perhaps you did n't know where I was, after all, and I was so frightened that I lay quite still.

"Mona Lisa turned so angrily to Celestine, I could see her quite plainly though she could n't see me. 'You ought to know by this time, my good girl, that I do not allow

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you to catechise me,' she said, and went out of the room.

"Celestine blew out the candle and muttered, — she was always muttering and I heard something about *enlèvement*, and I knew what that meant. Then she went out and shut the door.

"I got out of bed and prayed and prayed that some of you would come. I prayed till my knees were stiff and sore, it was such a thin carpet, and when I got back into bed I fell asleep, for I knew God would n't expect any more of a little girl like me.

"I woke early before Celestine, and got up and dressed very quietly. She grumbled at being disturbed, but to please her I did n't open the window because of her nostril.

"I went downstairs and out into the garden and walked up and down by the big hedge singing to myself, and thinking what had better be done, for I was quite

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determined that I would *not* go to Great Marlow. I had no money — I shall always carry at least sixpence for the future — and I wondered how in the world I was to get back to the Court. I did n't know then that you can drive, — it seemed such a long way in the train. So I prayed again, and then I saw the Giant, and I knew that God had paid attention to me, — He nearly always does. So I flew to the Giant across the grass, and he did n't waste time asking any questions, but sent me straight out to you, and there was no one in the inn passage, and the front door stood wide open, and it was quite easy, and you know the rest, Janey."

Most of this was told to us in that thrice happy drive home, as we sat squeezed together on the front seat of the dog-cart. We went back much more slowly than we had come, for the mare was rather tired, and the Giant would not hurry her.

As we drove through Garchester and

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over the two bridges into the dear, familiar lane my heart sang for joy; and when at last we turned into our own drive, I think it was the supremest moment I had ever known.

I can never remember clearly what happened in the next few minutes. The whole family met us at the hall door, and I rather think mother kissed the Giant in her excitement. She was the first to recover, though, and say, in her usual dry fashion, "My dear Fiametta, please go at once to Nurse and put on one of your own frocks, and you, Janey my child, had better go and perform the toilet only too evidently omitted this morning."

I believe that if the last trump had sounded while we were children, mother would have sent some of us back to brush our nails.

"O Nurse, I do love you! though you are rather cross," cried Fiametta, throwing her arms round that worthy's neck as she

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arrayed her in clean everything. "*You* don't smell of scent."

"I should hope I know my place better, Miss," replied Nurse severely; "and as for you, Miss Janey, going gallivanting off without your bath, I don't know what the family's coming to — that I don't. Fine doings indeed!"

No one could feel heroic for long if Nurse were anywhere about.

Just as lunch was nearly over and we were sitting in leisurely fashion over the cheese — Fiametta had gone to sit on father's knee to eat hers — we heard a carriage come up the drive, and the bell pealed loudly.

"Do you think they've come after me?" Fiametta asked anxiously.

Father set her down very gently, and said slowly, "I think — that there is no doubt — that some one — has come after you —"

Fiametta looked into his face and rushed

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to the door and into her father's arms: for there on the threshold stood Mr. Glynn. He was travel-stained, pale, and worn, but as the lithe blue figure leapt into his embrace he seemed to forget everything but what it held. And once in that safe haven, Fiametta was happiest of little maids in the pride of the double finding that had been achieved that day.

To me he said such beautiful, grateful things, that in spite of Nurse I felt something of a heroine till Paul unkindly pointed out that anybody would have done the same if they had had the dream.

As regarded the mysterious Mona Lisa, everybody, including Mr. Glynn, seemed so anxious to hush up the whole affair that I never heard it discussed any more. I know that she had the grace to be exceedingly alarmed by Fiametta's flight, for that very afternoon mother had a frantic telegram from her, confessing that she had taken the child, and asking if she had by any chance

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come back to us. Mother replied that "Fiametta was with her father," not a word more.

"I wonder which of us will be stole next," said Paul, as, on that memorable evening, we sat crowded together in easy inelegance on the largest wheelbarrow. "I do hope it will be me. I'd have much more adventures than Fee, anyhow."

"I was n't stolen," Fiametta said indignantly, "I went."

"Then," said Harry, "you ought to be whopped."

Fiametta arose from the wheelbarrow with as much dignity as was compatible with her position therein, shook out her dress, and marched haughtily down the garden path, calling over her shoulder to me, "Let 's go to Daddie, Janey, those stupid boys never understand things."

But the boys held me tight, and I was nothing loath to stay. The blue campanula was back in its place, the garden was once

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more fair and seemly, and the evening light was full of benediction; but I was conscious of the goodness of it all, and in such consciousness lies the beginning of that journey which leads so far away from the Child Country where —

"One suburb is stablished on firm earth; but one
Floats founded vague
In lubber-lands delectable — isles of palm,
And lotus, fortunate mains, far-shimmering seas,
The shining, shifting Sovranties of Dream."

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